

# THE SPHINX AND THE PHOENIX

## PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS

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## PREFACE

This is a collection of philosophical essays written during the period from 2000 to 2008 and published in various online journals and/or in my website and weblog. So why the Sphinx and the Phoenix?

To philosophize is to question everything; to question the world, our experiences, our beliefs, our motives, our ends; to subject all things to What? and to Why? There you have the Sphinx, and thus far few will be inclined to disagree.

What about the Phoenix? Here I expect much and strong opposition. I maintain that no genuine philosophical question is amenable to a definitive answer. Philosophy is concerned with ultimate mysteries — the mysteries of being, understanding, and value. By raising questions about these mysteries we create for ourselves intelligible worlds, real in their own right, but which, in seeking to represent the ultimate and the absolute in finite and determinate formulations of thought, necessarily falsify what they set out to reveal. When philosophy fails to acknowledge that its best pronouncements do no more than stammer out the ineffable it turns into dogmatic superstition. That is why true philosophy, as Plato saw clearly, can only speak in allegory and metaphor and myth and must constantly, as Plato insisted in the *Republic*, destroy its own foundational postulates. True philosophy must burn in the fire of dialectic that from the ashes new intelligible worlds may arise bringing with them enlightenment and insight, but only if they are prepared to burn in their turn on the altar of dialectic. There is my philosophical Phoenix, and if

what I say sounds as dark as the sayings of Heraclitus of old, I have to risk sounding arrogant by saying that any original philosophical thought cannot escape being in some measure enigmatic. Its value resides not in conveying definite knowledge but in provoking the receiving mind to think for itself. Anyhow, I hope that, if the reader is willing to bear out with me to the end of this volume, what I say may seem less dark and may be found to make sense.

Someone might wonder, if philosophy does not give us ascertained or ascertainable knowledge, does it still matter? The answer is to be found in the life and thought of Socrates — his life and thought as one integrated whole: for Socrates was a true paragon of humanity who lived his reasoning and reasoned his life — and there we have the answer to our question. Socrates early in life saw clearly that the investigation of the outer world cannot provide answers to the questions that concerned him. He was concerned with the ideas and ideals that constitute the specific character of human life and that set humans apart from all other animate beings. And he was convinced that those ideas and ideals do not come from the outer world and are not to be found anywhere in the outer world. It was his lifetime conviction that it is in taking hold of those ideas and ideals — examining them, clarifying them, assuring ourselves that we lived our lives in harmony with them — that we are truly human. In examining our minds we are examining ourselves, exercising the one power proper to us as human beings, and thus it is only in examining ourselves that we are truly ourselves.

Following Socrates, I maintain that what characterizes human beings, what makes human beings human, is that they live, strictly speaking, in a world constituted by ideas and ideals created by the human mind. Our ideas and ideals are our special world and the activity itself of creating these ideas and ideals is our reality. We are real, we are ourselves, in that activity and only in that activity. In philosophizing we discover our inner reality and we affirm our proper reality as human beings. Creative intelligence is our reality and is all the reality that we know.

This perhaps still sounds inscrutable, so, as Plato would say, let us go over the question once again. If the utmost that philosophy can give us are expendable answers to questions that can never be finally settled, what use is philosophy? Is it not sheer waste of time or worse still? Well, this is an issue concerning which our philosophers seem to be determined not to see the plain truth. The common wisdom has it that the empirical methods of the sciences are the only means to valid knowledge; all other employment of thought is nincompoop babbling. In all my writings I have been trying to put forward the view that the widespread denigration of philosophy is due to the failure to acknowledge the radical distinction between philosophical and scientific thinking. I freely allow that only science gives us knowledge; that we err when we think that philosophy is required to give or can give knowledge. Thus to accomplish the disengagement of the entangled forces of science and philosophy and escape confusion, I award all knowledge to science and all understanding to philosophy, even though it may go against the grain of common usage.

But while genuine philosophical problems are everlasting loci of insight-giving reflection, phoenixes ever embodied anew, ever to be burnt to ashes from which they ever arise in renewed vigour and creativity, there is a class of hotly-debated questions that should have long ago been laid to rest, not because they have or are capable of having definitive solutions, but because they are pseudo-problems that should never have arisen in the first place.

Much of what I have written since the publication of the first edition of *Let Us Philosophize* in 1998 has been directed towards trying to show the futility of engaging in controversy around such pseudo-problems. The controversies raging around the creation-evolution problem, the mind-body problem, the dualism-monism problem, the compatibility or incompatibility of free will with determinism, are intrinsically vicious and incapable of solution because they are wrongly formulated in the first place.

These controversies are further complicated by the fact that the contest in every case is waged on either side in a spirit of intransigent factionalism, each party wanting nothing less than complete victory and the total destruction of the opponents. Each faction makes bold claims, staking out

for itself a world – in its view the only world – of which it alone is master and in which no alien has a share.

On the one side we find religious dogmatism, armed with an infallible revelation, proclaiming for itself a monopoly on morals and values, and on the other side we find naturalism (the successor of materialism which expired when the substance of good old solid matter was found by physicists to be no more substantial than a mathematical equation), armed with the well-tried empirical methodology of the objective sciences, usurping for itself sovereignty over all truth and all reality.

The warring parties squeeze us in between them and deny us any room to move in. We are to side with the one party or the other. If we say that human dignity demands that we reason, that we shake off the thralldom of dogma and break the shackles of superstition, the religious party at once attacks us as materialists, deniers of all morality and all values. If we dare so much as to make mention of spiritual values, the naturalist party immediately bounces upon us, stigmatizing us as supernaturalist traffickers in superstition.

The situation would be laughable if it were not tragic. In article after article I tried to say that the either-or formulation of such debates is fundamentally flawed and can never lead to a sensible view, only to find myself (within the handful of readers my writings have reached) vehemently castigated on both sides as if I had sided with the either or with the or. I have a mind to vow that the papers collected in this volume will be the last I will ever write on such controversial issues. (A vow not hard to keep perhaps, because I probably have little time left in which I may renege.)

Another area where needless futile and definitely harmful controversy goes on interminably is the area of what we might call applied ethics, such as questions of bioethics and social morality — conflicting approaches to the questions of euthanasia, abortion, human rights *versus* security. Here, through the spirit of contention and the false expectation that theoretical argumentation can yield decisive results, both contending parties fall victim to the delusion that they are being rational and believe themselves in

possession of the whole truth. Here the crux of the matter is not that definitive truth is not attainable but that in the imperfection of the actual world values which, in the absolute, are not contradictory, in particular circumstances can and do clash. The solution cannot be theoretical but practical, to be sought in civilized, amicable mutual recognition and mutual sympathy. The hubris of specious rationality, breeding intransigence and intolerance is not rational but is the negation of rationality, it is that worst kind of ignorance that Socrates sought to combat, not knowing that we do not know.

There is one other matter I have to clear out to obviate a misjudgement to which I am likely to be subjected. In the preface to the 1998 edition of *Let Us Philosophize* I wrote:

I am very much conscious of being a living anachronism. In the first place, the major trends and basic tenets presented in the following pages were in the main formed some half a century ago. In the second place, both during my formative years and ever since, I have had the misfortune of being effectually cut off from contact with the currents of contemporary thought. Also my readings in the older philosophers have always been severely limited and dictated by chance.

That was meant to be taken as strictly and literally true. Since then, even though, thanks to the wonders of the Internet, I may have sneaked a few looks through the peepholes of my cloister, still the constraints of time, circumstance, and means have continued to limit drastically my acquaintance with recent and contemporary works. I am bringing this out because now and then I have been surprised to find in a thinker I had never read before a passage or a trend of thought to which there is a close parallel – sometimes down to identity of phrase – in my writings. To give an example, after having put this preface in what I thought was its final form, I came across an excerpt from Hilary Putnam's *Realism With a Human Face* (<http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/putnam04.htm>) in which I found whole sentences, whole paragraphs even, to which I could produce exact parallels from things I had written before I had read a single line of Putnam's. A reader who comes on such spots in my writings is likely to

charge me with despicably neglecting to acknowledge a source or influence or even with outright plagiarism. I know it would be near-impossible to me then to prove my innocence. My debt to older sources is plainly spelt out on my pages.

Like all my writings, the papers collected here are gropings for light in the dark den of life. I wished to arrange these papers on some coherent principle. But after much shuffling and shifting I had on my hands a jumble that was neither consistently set in chronological order nor completely grouped thematically. Let it be. The reader may take them up in any order, but I hope that s/he will read them all since they complement and elucidate one another, being fragmented chips of an integrative philosophy. In fact, in revising the papers for this collection, I was pleasantly surprised to find that, taken as a whole, they give a complete, though unsystematic, account of my philosophy, except for the airiest plane of ontology covered mainly in Book Two of *Let Us Philosophize* and touched upon in my other books.

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## PHILOSOPHY AS PROPHECY

[This paper, as it appears here, is a fusion of the original essay under the same title with a shorter modified version titled “A Confessed Heresy”.]

This paper voices a protest against the dominant trends in contemporary philosophy. I seek to present an unorthodox (though not quite original) conception of the nature of philosophical thinking. Since it is part of this conception that argument and proof have at best only an ancillary role to play in philosophy, I will not offer any argument but will present a series of statements and reflections which, taken together, form what purports to be an internally coherent position.

The conception I wish to advance goes back to Socrates. I maintain that Socrates was the first and perhaps the only philosopher who had a true insight into the proper nature of philosophical thinking; and that though Plato with his inimitable dramatic genius has preserved for us in his early dialogues the true Socratic insight, he himself wavered in his grasp of that insight. Ever since, philosophical thinking has been beset by two illusions: (1) the illusion that philosophy can, or is meant to, give us knowledge; and (2) the illusion that philosophical statements need or are susceptible of proof.

I maintain that philosophical thinking is creative, concerned with generating ideas and ideals that give meaning and value to the world and to human life and that it is necessary that philosophers go back to the Socratic

insight and realize the radical distinction between philosophy on the one hand and natural science and mathematics on the other hand.

## I. The Socratic insight

Socrates was first and foremost concerned with the ideas and ideals that give meaning and value to human life and that constitute the humanity of humankind. He was convinced that those ideas and ideals are not to be found in nature, but only in the human mind. They do not come to us from outside ourselves and cannot be discovered in the objective world. Philosophy does not seek and cannot give us knowledge of the world, of anything objective, but seeks and gives us understanding of what is of most concern to us.

This, in my view, is the meaning we should attach to the Socratic insistence on the principle of philosophical ignorance as the ground of all wisdom. We can never understand anything beyond the immediacy of the idea. It is the idea that is real and gives reality to all things in the world. When we seek to grasp the essence of those very ideas that are all the reality we know, they elude us and merge into each other, and the only reality we are left with is the activity of our mind in its quest for understanding. And that activity of the mind that is the only certain reality we know, the only reality we know immediately, is our special excellence as human beings. Hence Socrates maintains that *phronêsis* is *aretê* and *aretê* is *phronêsis*. Intellectual and moral integrity are one and the same thing. That one reality we know, that one virtue we have, is ‘that in us which thrives by doing good and is harmed by doing ill’.

## II. Philosophy does not give knowledge

In turning away from physical speculation, Socrates drew a clear line between science and philosophy proper. It is essential that we let that distinction stand out in the clearest light. Philosophical thinking is a creative activity that brings into being conceptual patterns which transform the mute givenness of the world into an intelligible reality. The difference between

scientific knowledge and philosophic understanding can best be explained by the example given by Socrates in the *Phaedo* (St.98c-99a). Socrates is seated on a bed in his prison. Physiology telling us of his bones, muscles and tendons gives us knowledge about his posture. Philosophy telling us of his ideas of honour, loyalty and justice gives us understanding of his being there in his Athens prison rather than with Crito's friends in Thessaly.

While philosophy does not give us factual information about the world, the methods and procedures which give us objective knowledge can never answer any of our philosophical questions. I can know things, manipulate them and put them to good use or – alas! more often – to bad use. But I don't understand them. I can only understand my ideas because they are my own creation (or the creation of minds akin to my own), and I understand them not by dissecting or analyzing them but by embracing them with the innocence of a simple child; by foolishly affirming with Socrates, 'It is by Beauty that a beautiful thing is beautiful'.

Philosophy speaks of one reality, the sole primary reality that we know immediately: our own creative intelligence. All the other realities it tells us about, are realities it creates, are myths that constitute the only world in which we live as intelligent, rational beings, the world of the spiritual life, of reason, ideals and values. Science tells us about the world but tells us nothing about anything that is real.

No amount of facts can explain a reality. Life is an idea, a reality, a mystery. Biologists, microbiologists, biochemists, can add to our objective knowledge about the constitution and the processes of living things, but life will remain what it is and has always been for us, a creative idea, a reality, a mystery. Neuroscientists and psychologists can go on doing fruitful research and amassing facts and advancing admirable theories, but consciousness, thought, mind, feeling, understanding — all of these will remain what they are, realities and mysteries.

Philosophy does not, like science, discover facts, objective truth; philosophy does not, like mathematics, deduce logical certainties, demonstrable truth. If we have to speak of truth at all in connection with philosophy, we must say that philosophy, like a poem, like a symphony, creates its truth. Philosophy, properly, is oracular.

### III. Creative intelligence

Our ideas constitute the intelligible world we live in. Any system of ideas constitutes a particular universe of discourse. When Socrates says, 'I would rather suffer wrong than do wrong', this statement is neither analytic nor verifiable. It is creative; it gives us a meaningful world in which we live on a new plane of being.

It is in creating and by creating our own ideal world that we perceive, know, understand the given world. In a Humean world state B succeeds state A without any connection between the two. It is only by virtue of the audacious idea – that can never be proved, never justified, never explained – that state A causes state B, that we live in a meaningful world, have consciousness, and have self-identity. This I call a creative idea.

When we state that ideas stem from the mind, the question we are addressing is not, Where do ideas come from?, for the separation of the mind and sense-experience is no more than a fiction. The important consideration is that when ideas grow out of sense-experience they grow into and constitute a new plane of being.

All reasoning must rest ultimately on a creatively posited idea. The ideas of infinity, nothingness, perfection, equally with the ideas of justice or equality, can never be found in the world. They are not 'out there' to be discovered. They are creations of the mind. The only being they have is their being in the ideal universe.

No great thinker has ever reached any of his most fecund thoughts by an inference. The thought always comes as a creative solution to a problem: it arrays the elements of the problem in a whole in which they obtain intelligibility.

Spinoza advances the substance of his great *Ethics* in the eight 'definitions' and seven axioms with which he begins. In the subsequent 'geometrical demonstration' he unfolds, develops, and weaves together those original concepts.

#### IV. Only what is whole is real

Our only contact with reality is in the totality of immediate experience as creative intelligence. I call this the wholeness of the act. Only what is whole is real, but reasoning can only operate by breaking up the totality; yet the moment it does, it is enmeshed in falsehood. It can only redeem itself by acknowledging that its analytical proceeding is a necessity to be humbly endured, not a virtue to be vaunted.

Substance and properties, universals and particulars, subject and object, mind and body, form and content, are all fruitful distinctions; but once we take the implied separation seriously, once we take the distinctions for more than useful fictions, treating the distinct concepts as actualities, we fall into the sin of fragmenting the total act and are trapped in a veritable labyrinth of endless controversy.

When Plato sins by taking ‘that in us which prospers by good deeds and is maimed by bad deeds’ as not only conceptually distinct from the body, but as factually separate from it; when he takes the distinction for more than a fecund myth and regards soul and body as objective existents, he plunges philosophical thinking into the labyrinthine hades from which it has been ever since vainly labouring to extricate itself.

Philosophers nowadays think that the more finely they pulverize their subject-matter, the closer they get to the ever elusive goal of grasping reality. They don’t realize that quite on the contrary, the more they pound their material the farther removed they are from living reality. Philosophy cannot examine things piecemeal. It is the hallmark of philosophy to aim at the comprehensive view, to connect issues, to see all questions as aspects of one underlying problem. Contemporary philosophers revel in the piecemeal. Well and good, if this is taken as a step in a wider-ranging movement; but to stop at that is to negate the philosophic endeavour.

#### V. Philosophical statements are not provable

Philosophical statements are not susceptible of proof: they do not follow necessarily from premises. A philosophical statement is an intelligible

whole. Its intelligibility is its reality and is of the nature of the aesthetic coherence of a symphony or a poem. The rationality of philosophy does not consist in submission to any formal logic but in complete adherence to intellectual integrity; in its uncompromising demand for intelligibility.

Deductive thinking always proceeds within a closed system. In *Phaedrus* 245c-246a there is a close-knit argument that Aristotle must have coveted. No argument could have more force. And yet what does it 'prove'? Only the reality of the idea. The argument roams and rambles within the universe of the idea. It neither derives the idea of the soul – of the self-moving, self-positing being – from anything outside of it, nor steps out of the idea to anything outside of it. The whole argument is a display of the idea. To my mind, this shows the true nature of philosophical thinking. It is not deductive; it is not inductive; it is not argumentative: it is creative.

The argument of a good philosophical book or a good essay or article is never a chain of syllogisms. It can more truly be characterized as an aesthetically satisfying mosaic of related ideas and relevant instances, a landscape of a region of human experience. What gives that mosaic, that landscape, its significance, its truthfulness? It is truthful in such measure as it reflects our internal reality and has its significance in revealing to us that reality.

So modern philosophers with all their arguments and refutations and counter-refutations have been ploughing the sand because they overlooked the fact that philosophy is not concerned with truth and falsity but with meaningfulness.

Properly, philosophy is not discursive but oracular. He understands the true nature of philosophy best who, like Nietzsche, speaks in aphorisms and paradoxes.

## VI. All determinate thought involves falsehood

Philosophical thinking cannot pretend to finality. There are no absolutely true statements. No concept, however precise, can be free of contradiction. Every determinate thought can be shown to involve falsehood. The moment



we articulate a thought and give it a determinate form, we necessarily infect it with the contradictoriness inherent in all finitude. All the refinements of logic, sophisticated notations, quantifications, etc., will not cure the disease inherent in all determinate thought. The disease is not in the symbols or formulae but in the content we put into them. Be the formal language as perfect as it may, the moment we try to give it substance by giving its variables determinate values, we find these necessarily carrying with them the corruption that is inherent in all existence, in all finitude and all particularity. Any doctrine, any theory, is a myth that has to be taken with the urbanity of well-bred society that winks at a tall yarn.

In the early dialogues of Plato, every definition advanced, every position propounded, is shown to be wanting: in the modern jargon, for every definition and every position a counter-example is readily provided. The whole history of philosophy and especially the whole course of philosophical controversy throughout the past century are evidence enough that no theory, no principle, no tenet is immune to this fate.

Philosophers, faced with such a contradiction, instead of simply acknowledging that it is in the nature of all thought to be contradictory, posit distinctions and hypotheses that in turn prove to be contradictory, and find themselves in an interminable maze. When they prove one another wrong and end up all looking ludicrous, what lands them in this quandary is not want of brains but want of humility. They should realize that all determinate thought, in striving after truth, can only capture half-truths that can only be redeemed of falsehood by recognizing their essential falsehood.

A relatively coherent statement gives understanding; its criticism gives us understanding; but once we regard either the original statement or the criticism as anything more than a parable – once we seek to endow either with finality – we are in the shackles of dogma, which is compounded ignorance: we do not know and do not know that we do not know.

The immediacies of experience are incommunicable and language is communication. A language to be effective must be shared and it can only be shared by denoting generalities and all generality involves falsehood. The quest for a perfect language is a wild-goose chase. And this is a blessing. If we had a perfect language, language would no longer be a tool we possess;

we would be tools somnambulistically acting out operations dictated by our language programme.

Philosophy is creative thinking. The end-product of thinking, accomplished thought, by the very fact that it is a finished product, stands at variance with the reality of thinking. Hence to claim to give any definitive expression of philosophical truth is to belie the nature of philosophical truth.

We are told that the business of logic is to ascertain that the inference shall be true if the premises are true. All this really amounts to is that logic assumes the role of an umpire that sees to it that the game is played according to rule. If it is, the inference is correct: but is it true? Yes, if the premises are true. But there's the rub: no premise is ever absolutely true. We tolerate a proposition as long as it serves our purposes, but in every case and at all times we can choose to introduce a refinement or a distinction that renders it untrue, because it is in the nature of all determinate thought to be immersed in falsity.

Logic is definitely a tool that philosophers may use to introduce some order into their intellectual larder. It contributes nothing of substance. It can prove nothing by its own native powers. Philosophers and logicians surely know all this at heart, and yet they often behave as if they expected their sophistications to yield truth and certainty. They seem to stand very much in need of the foolish little child that will cry out, 'The Emperor has no clothes on!'

Truth, with a capital T, is ineffable. The gods jealously guard it within their own minds. They only vouchsafe to humans the utterance of half-truths. He only is wise who, like Socrates, knows that he cannot speak the whole truth or even so much as a complete truth.

## VII. Philosophical thinking is mythical

We only know Reality immediately in intelligent creative activity. It is in the creativity of intelligence that we obtain reality, become real ourselves, and in becoming real come to know what Reality is like.

Philosophy is a creation of the mind, an expanse of intelligibility and

hence of reality. It does not reflect reality but, out of the reality of the philosopher's creative intelligence, engenders a new order of reality. The philosopher, equally with the poet and the artist, creates life-giving illusions.

Philosophy seeks to give expression to Reality, and Reality as perfection transcends all determination, all finitude, all particularity; but thought can only be determinate, finite, particularized. Hence, all philosophical thought is allegorical, expresses itself in myth. To overlook this is to destroy philosophy.

If understanding is, as I hold, not a passive reception of a meaning or truth or whatever you may call it, coming from outside us, but is a creative projection of a pattern that gives actuality to the reality of our inner intelligence and in so doing confers meaning on the given, then myth must be the only means by which the mind can obtain understanding.

A system of philosophy can be as rational as Aristotle's, as Leibniz', as Kant's; yet the concepts used in any such system correspond to nothing actually existing. They are manners of presenting the totality of experience in an intelligible universe. They are ideal constructs or rational myths: they give us insight and understanding; they give us patterns through which we can live intelligently, through which we can confer reality on the contingent actuality of our existence. Yet any thinker can take those concepts and systems and, by presuming them to aim at giving factual knowledge, show them one and all to be erroneous and contradictory. So philosophers do quite well when they create their myths. But when they forget that the myths are their own creations and start dealing with them as actualities, they find themselves in deep trouble.

I ask of a philosopher what I ask of a poet — to give me a vision, then leave me at liberty to make of it what I will. The great creative philosophers have given us worlds to live in. I live in the world of Spinoza as much as in that of Berkeley, in the world of Whitehead as much as in that of Bradley, in the world of Santayana as much as in that of Schopenhauer. A philosopher that makes it his business to demolish a rival vision teaches me nothing, enriches me in no way.

Let us by all means criticize Spinoza and Kant and Bradley. But we will never come into possession of the treasures of wisdom and insight they left us until we embrace their great parables with the innocence of the little child

entering heart and soul and mind into the enchanted world her grandma unfolds to her in fairy tales — alas! gone are the days when little children naively walked hand in hand with fairies and philosophers foolishly embraced Reality and Truth; in the electronic age lower-case reality and truth are good enough for us, though we know for a certainty that we can never lay hold of them.

Just as we have discovered that we can have different geometries, so we have to, and we will eventually, accustom ourselves to the idea that we can have different logics and different metaphysics, in other words, different universes of discourse. We can have a Platonic, an Aristotelean, a Leibnizean, a Kantian, a Hegelian, a Bergsonian universe of discourse: these are all equally valid though they may not be equally valuable. Just as, once we free ourselves of religious dogma, we can find meaning and beauty in Greek, Hindu, Hebrew or Christian mythology, so when we rid ourselves of the delusion that there is one true philosophy, we will find meaning and value in all philosophical systems.

We are all children playing at building sandcastles on the shore of Reality. This is not a counsel of despair, but of sagacity. It means we must humbly accept our limitations and redeem our original sin of finite existence by avowing that all of our wisdom and all of our philosophy is mythology.

## VIII. The futility of argumentation

All argument involves the introduction of distinctions and the election of a specific perspective. The perspective and the distinctions afford a view that has in it a certain measure of reality but that is necessarily partial and relative and in a measure false.

Two analyses of an initial situation, two theories, are not exclusive alternatives, one of which being true the other must be false. They are descriptions from different viewpoints, both equally true and equally false. That is why any theory can and will be countered with valid objections. We should distinguish between positive criticism (dialectic) and negative refutation (eristic). Positive criticism of a philosophical position, starting

from the necessary insufficiency of all ideal formulations, develops a new position fully knowing that this in turn will necessarily prove to be insufficient. Mere refutation is juggling with words. You can only refute a thesis proposed by a thoughtful person by adducing to the terms s/he employs other meanings; by shifting the boundaries of the distinctions s/he made, ignoring the fact that those distinctions can, in the nature of things, be nothing but *ad hoc*.

Philosophers argue as if a word, taken in isolation, can have a meaning. A word only has meaning within a particular universe of discourse. It is futile to oppose Spinoza's 'substance' to Locke's 'substance', Berkeley's 'idea' to Hume's 'idea', Aristotle's 'being' to Bradley's 'being'.

We speak of Theory of Knowledge as if there is or should be or can be one correct theory of knowledge, and when we speak of theories of knowledge in the plural we imply that the various theories are conflicting and (in varying degrees) incompatible hypotheses towards the one true account of knowledge. I maintain that there can be no such thing as the Theory of Knowledge because there is no fixity or finality in the domain of the mind. I maintain that we should always speak of a theory of knowledge as a particular representation, from a particular perspective, of the activity and the content of the mind.

Argumentation in philosophy is a game, a play with concepts. It is an interesting game; a pleasant game; a useful game in that it keeps our minds alert and breaks down the casings that thought is doomed ever to set up and ever to demolish on pain of being suffocated to extinction; a good game in that in it we exercise the life proper to rational beings. But it must always be consciously practised as a game. The moment we take it too seriously, the moment we imbue its terms with finality, we negate its usefulness and its goodness; we turn it from virtue into sin, from a liberating exercise into fossilizing idolatry.

Philosophy cannot live except in an atmosphere permeated with the salubrious air of argumentation, and in its subsidiary disciplines has to make use of the methods and procedures of the sciences. But the arguments prove nothing. The arguments discover the implications of the ideas creatively posited. In its creative work, philosophy has no place for argumentation.

## IX. Rationality

Philosophy is distinct from religion and mythology, but a philosophy that is not concerned with the ultimate questions of meaning and value addressed by religion and mythology is no philosophy. Philosophy is distinct from science, but a philosophy not possessed of the rationality and intellectual integrity of science, is no philosophy. Thought becomes rational when it frankly and urbanely submits itself to questioning.

The ever-renewed philosophic endeavour is a persistent movement towards greater consistency and clarity in our thinking, a movement which can never come to an end – or, should never come to an end – because thought can never adequately represent reality: When thought thinks itself adequate to reality, it is no longer living but fossilized.

When I deny that philosophical thinking is argumentative, I mean simply to deny that philosophy reaches its main principles and most important ideas inferentially. Those principles and ideas are always the outcome of a creative process. But then there is another aspect of philosophy, which I stress when I insist on the necessity of rationality. To satisfy its vital need for rationality, philosophy uses argument as a method for realizing clarity and consistency in our ideas, for integrating our ideas into a system, a whole; for that vital need for rationality is nothing but the need of the mind for wholeness, to be whole and to realize itself in wholes.

What we should aim at in reasoning, the sole thing we can achieve by reasoning, is not absolute truth or certainty, but the highest attainable measure of harmony in our thought, the highest possible integrity of our mind. That is what it means to be rational: not to have sound knowledge or definitive theories or doctrines, but to be whole and sound in mind.

We, students of philosophy, all of us, beginning with the great Plato, have betrayed Father Socrates, and the nemesis of our betrayal is the maze we find ourselves in.

Present-day philosophers will describe, paraphrase, quantify ‘A thing of beauty is a joy for ever’, and we end up with no beauty, no joy and no duration. I want back the beauty and the joy even if not for ever but only for

a passing moment.

I do not believe in the immortality of the soul and Plato does not pretend that any of the arguments in the *Phaedo* for the immortality of the soul are conclusive; yet reading the *Phaedo* gives me possession of – puts me in communion with – ‘that in us which flourishes by what is right and withers by what is wrong’. This is the true work of prophetic philosophy.

Note: In this essay I may have spoken in impious and harsh terms of Plato. I was not targeting Plato so much as common misconceptions and misunderstandings to which Plato may have inadvertently contributed. For a more just view of Plato I have to refer the reader to my *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005) and *Socrates' Prison Journal* (2006).

## KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

The tragedy of the human situation and the gravest danger that threatens our civilization and our very existence reside in the fact that we have too much knowledge and too little understanding. And what compounds the problem is that we labour under the false notion that the way to gain the understanding we need is to accumulate more and more knowledge, because we fail to realize that knowledge and understanding are two totally distinct things.

I do not intend to give definitions of knowledge and understanding or to advance any fixed terminology. In the central part of Plato's *Republic* (Bk. V St.471 to the end of Bk. VII) the concepts of knowledge, understanding and reason are crucial. Now if we refer to a number of standard English translations (Jowett, Taylor, Lindsay, Cornford, Lee, etc.) we will not find much agreement in their use of these terms. With concepts so rich and so vital it is no wonder that there should be much overlapping and interchangeability. I mention this to preclude any unnecessary wrangling over words. My purpose is to draw a clear distinction between two concepts; for the rest I will say with Shakespeare,

What's in a name? That which we call a rose,  
By any other name would smell as sweet.



Historically, by experience, observation, trial and error, we acquired the knowledge that enabled us to survive. All of our present-day science and technology is nothing but a refinement of that primitive proceeding that has amply proved its survival value. But it was in mythology and religion, at first, that humankind sought understanding, and then in philosophy. And though the distinction between science and philosophy was not clearly drawn and there continued to be some confusion between the problems and methods proper to each, yet intelligent human beings continued to move along the parallel routes of acquiring knowledge and seeking understanding at the same time, until modern times.

Then, with the dizzying practical successes of science during the past four centuries, and especially during the past four or five decades, science gradually usurped the whole domain, and it became an unquestioned article of the common intellectual outlook that all questions posed by the human mind are grist for the scientific mill, with the result that we are now glutted with knowledge and famished for understanding. The distinction between science and philosophy that was formerly obscure and that has lately been completely obliterated, has now to be reinstated and clearly marked. I contend that this is now a vital necessity.

Empiricists (of all brands) want us to be content with the objective. They tell us we have no use for the concepts of mind, spirit, feeling, etc. True, we have in the realm of the objectively given all that we need to know, all that we can know. Those same empiricists do not in practice deny the existence of the subjective life: they love and laugh and enjoy the thrill of working on their scientific puzzles. They do not consider all of this an illusion. I do not want to speak for them and say how they would characterize it, but I may say they think that that region does not merit their serious attention, the attention of their scientific minds, it has to do merely with their quotidian goings and comings.

I have no desire to change their minds, but I have a mind of my own, and to my mind, it is this realm that is the realm of reality and it is the realm that philosophers of the old cast thought most deserving of attention. Unfortunately, those philosophers also thought that from that realm they

could derive objective knowledge. That was an error, an error which the empiricists were right in decrying. But when the empiricists went on to conclude that those philosophers were utter fools and all their speculations sheer nonsense, they were closing to humankind the portals of wisdom and understanding.

If philosophy is to perform its proper role of giving us understanding, it must relinquish any claim to provide us with knowledge of the objective world. It is not for no reason that religion is actively being advanced as the alternative to science. It is because science cannot satisfy the spiritual needs of humankind — this very phrase scientists want us to ban as the worst of blasphemies. But when philosophers proudly tell us that their systems give us objective verities or any definitive truths, scientists or, more often, other philosophers have no trouble at all in reducing those systems to tatters.

Shall we then hold on to religious dogmatism or shall we say that electrons and protons and market forces (whatever that might be) are the only realities? Do we really have here the two horns of an inescapable dilemma? My answer is: No, for we can have a philosophy that indeed does not give us facts but does give us whole worlds of meanings and spiritual realities to live in — and, what is more, meanings and spiritual realities the generation of which is the very life of reason: the life of reason is the exercise of creative intelligence.

My insistence on a clear and radical separation of science and philosophy and my emphasis on the mythical nature of philosophical thinking should not be construed as anti-scientism or irrationalism. I emphatically maintain that reason is the sole ground of the dignity of humankind. When I say that science cannot give us understanding I mean that the scientific approach, by dint of which science is solely concerned with the objective and the given, places out of its domain the questions of why and essence and meaning. When I say that all philosophical thinking is mythical, I mean that philosophical thinking, dealing as it does with meanings and ideal realities, cannot produce or discover actualities.

We now live under a veritable deluge of information, of facts; facts which are all surface, with nothing beneath. More than ever before, we now need to

stop and think – meditate and contemplate – and put meaning into the world.  
Only creative philosophy can help us do that.

## ON WHAT IS REAL: AN ANSWER TO QUINE'S "ON WHAT THERE IS"

[This essay was first published in *The Examined Life Online Journal*, Volume II, Issue 8, Winter 2001. For the record, as far as I remember, I was working on this essay when W. V. O. Quine died on Christmas Day 2000.]

### I

Quine, in his classic essay "On What There Is", purports to deal with the nominalist-realist controversy about universals. In this essay I maintain that nominalists and realists alike, in speaking of the existence or non-existence of universals perpetrate and perpetuate the common modern error of ignoring reality.

I oppose reality to existence. I have been taken to task for that on the ground that the word reality is already overburdened with different meanings. My defence is that we very much need to draw a clear line between existence for all of the essentially transient content of the world, on the one hand, and reality, on the other hand, for the abiding principle that transcends the mutability and multiplicity of the existent. (For a fuller statement of this position, see my *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008), *passim*, but particularly Book Two: Reality.)

The earliest Ionian thinkers sought that first principle in various substrata. Heraclitus stressed the transience of all existents and sought the abiding

principle in the ever-living fire that consumes all and brings forth all anew. Parmenides emphasized the unity, the changelessness, the wholeness of the real, and left no room for the actual world which presses in on us from every side.

Socrates was not concerned with the world but only with the ideals and values by which alone we live our specifically human life. And those ideals and values we do not find in the world; they are born in the mind: it is only in the mind and the ideas of the mind that we have that life of intelligence in virtue of which we are human beings and which constitutes our true worth. Hence Socrates drew a line between scientific investigation, concerned with the factual, the actual and the existent, on the one hand, and philosophical inquiry, concerned with ideals and values, on the other hand.

Plato identified the Socratic domain of ideals and values with the realm of reality. He uses the words *alêtheia*, *ousia*, *to on* for the same thing, and even where the terms are not simply interchangeable, they at any rate point to one reality — reality as the perfection of being, the union of intelligence and goodness: *alêtheia* in Plato does not mean truth as correspondence with or conformity to any actuality, but as the perfection of reality. The quest of the philosopher is not for what there is but for what is real.

The gist of the theory of knowledge expounded in the *Republic* and graphically illustrated in the allegory of the cave is that the knowledge of the things of the world is imperfect knowledge, and that only the knowledge of pure ideas is knowledge of reality. The moderns think this is balderdash. We Platonists say this is the whole of philosophy.

All that Plato says about the Forms and the Form of the Good and its relation to intelligence and the intelligible world is metaphor and myth, and he never claimed it to be anything but that. But Plato's metaphors and myths place us firmly in possession of the intelligible world in which we live in reality.

The doctrine of anamnesis and the doctrine of the separate existence of the Forms (whether either or both of these doctrines originated with Socrates or with Plato) were no more than a 'likely tale' turning the mind away from what becomes toward what is. To the end of his life Plato never suggested

that he had a definitive theory of the Forms or of their relation to the things in the world. (See my *Plato: An Interpretation*, chapter 1, “The Intelligible Forms” and chapter 5, “The Meaning of the *Phaedo*”.)

Plato was the first to see that his conception of Forms gave rise to many theoretical problems. He grappled with those problems without ever claiming that he had a definitive answer or that anything of what he said was to be taken as literal truth. The only thing he held to firmly was that the life we have in that realm is the only true life, and in that sense, that realm is the only reality worth the name.

## II

When, from around the seventeenth century onwards, science made its tremendous leaps in the field of knowledge of the world and mastery of the world, modern thinkers directed all their attention to that domain of scientific knowledge, of existents, and forgot about the world of reality. As if that was not bad enough, the British Empiricists did not simply ignore the realm of reality, they positively denied it: the world of objective knowledge was all that could be known or need be known.

Aristotle was concerned to show the error of taking the separate existence of the Forms as literal truth, giving the impression that Plato so took it. In so doing Aristotle was responsible for giving rise to the problem that was to be known as the problem of universals and the controversy about the existence of the universals that continues to rage to the present day.

The problem of universals may be summarized as follows: We cannot make any meaningful statement without using some word or words of a general nature, standing for a quality, a class, a number: let us call these general kinds universals. In what sense and where can we say those universals are?

Quine argues against the position of logical realism which affirms the existence of universals. He champions the outright nominalist position which affirms that universals have no existence apart from particular things. Now this controversy could be treated as a linguistic dispute, and could then

be easily resolved by agreeing on what we mean by such terms as 'existence', 'reality', 'entity', 'being', etc. But the controversy conceals a deeper problem which neither logical realists nor logical nominalists fathom.

Realists say there are universals. When nominalists say there are only concrete things they are not contradicting the realists but are defining and limiting their 'are'. Quine claims to advance "an explicit standard whereby to decide what the ontological commitments of a theory are" (p. 43). But in proposing a criterion he effectively defines his ontology, and it is not open to him to rule out alternative ontologies. [The page references I give are to the version of the essay reproduced in *Contemporary Readings in the Foundations of Metaphysics*, ed. Stephen Laurence and Cynthia Macdonald, Blackwell, 1998, pp.32-45.]

But if the dispute between realists and nominalists were resolved wholly as a matter of definition and terminology, we would perhaps at last have peace but no real gain. (Peace is a blessing devoutly to be sought in our actual lunacy-ridden world, but not in the intellectual world.) We have to probe the kernel hidden from view by the dust raised by the mighty contest.

At bottom the question is not really about what there is and what there is not, but about which world, the world of things or the world of ideas, is more worthy of our attention. While both parties to the controversy are at fault in turning their back to the realm of reality, what fuels the feud is perhaps that realists somehow, half-knowingly and half-heartedly, keep hankering after the realm of reality, while nominalists are quite content with throwing it overboard and living in the world of the this and the now.

Quine argues against two classes of (logical) realists, a more naïve class which he lumps together in the fictional McX, and a more sophisticated class which he represents by the fictional Wyman. I am not concerned to defend either McX or Wyman or any of the historical characters that stand behind them. In criticizing Quine my purpose is to criticize an approach and assumptions shared by nominalists and realists alike.

If there is not much explicit criticism of the realist side of the controversy in what follows, this is simply because I am here discussing Quine's essay. It

is not my purpose to argue against Quine's argument against his opponents, real or fictitious.

### III

Quine begins his essay by remarking on the simplicity of the ontological problem. He tells us that it can be put in three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables, 'What is there?' (p. 43.) But nothing in thought and nothing in language is simple: a thought comes to birth already itself heavy with child, and at the slightest touch procreates progeny that defy the parent. This follows from the creativity of all reality. Two of Quine's three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables – 'is' and 'there' – have bred and continue to breed volumes and volumes of learned disputation. (The remaining one of the trio, 'what', may look peaceful enough in the present context, but can outdo the other two in roguery when given the slightest provocation.) As Quine says in concluding his opening paragraph: "There remains room for disagreement over cases; and so the issue has stayed alive down the centuries" (p. 32).

One would expect the ontological problem of universals to be the central theme of the essay, but Quine gives priority and more space and attention to the problem of nonbeing which he considers to be the main source of the realist delusion. The realists are, according to Quine, entrapped in an indefensible position by their failure to see through the eristic problem of nonbeing: how can we say *x* is not, without implying that somehow it is? It is the pseudo-problem of nonbeing that lures realists "to impute being where they might otherwise be quite content to recognize that there is nothing" (p. 32). He somehow ties up the controversy with "the old Platonic riddle of nonbeing", which he irreverently nicknames 'Plato's beard' (p. 32). This is as unjust as it is irreverent. Plato did not originate the riddle of nonbeing; he found it rife and successfully unriddled it in the *Sophist* (St.236c-264b).

To say that a thing is not, if the statement is not to be self-contradictory, must mean that the thing in question does not belong to a certain context, a specific setting. Plato in the *Sophist* shows that in meaningful negation 'x is not' can always be construed as 'x is other than y'. So for the nominalist to



say that abstract ideas are not can only have meaning if taken to mean that abstract ideas are not among the things of the physical world (however we formulate this there will be objections), which nobody ever asserted.

I find fault with the nominalists not for their explicit denial that ideas exist but for then going on to talk and act as if ideas did not matter. Ideas do matter, if you will pardon the crudity of the idiom. I therefore concede all existence to Empiricists but insist that ideas are real: existents have no reality apart from ideas; ideas have no existence except when particularized (in the modern lingo, instantiated). But both this sheer existence bereft of reality and this pure reality devoid of existence are fictions of thought. Only meaningful actuality, existence infused with intelligible form, is a living reality.

When Quine says that his fictional McX (standing for the more naïve class of logical realists) “would sooner be deceived by the crudest and most flagrant counterfeit than grant the nonbeing of Pegasus” (p. 33), he is not only wronging McX who would never say that Pegasus was in the same class as the Parthenon, but is surreptitiously slipping in his own definition of being (‘is’), according to which to be is to be physical, for only on this understanding can the affirmation of the being of Pegasus be ruled contradictory. Pegasus has a true existence in mythology, in the pages of philosophers disputing whether Pegasus is or is not, in the imagination of every child that has studied the classics, but it does not exist in any wood or prairie or zoo on good Mother Earth. When that is brought out in the open the whole controversy is seen as a contest over who has the right to impose her/his preferred linguistic usage. So Quine is not justified in saying, “The notion that Pegasus must be, because it would otherwise be nonsense to say even that Pegasus is not, has been seen to lead McX into an elementary confusion” (p. 33). All he may justly say is that the notion in question has led McX to contravene the Quinean rule for the use of ‘is’.

Quine complains that for Wyman saying that Pegasus is not actual is on a par, logically, with saying that the Parthenon is not red (p. 33). If Wyman in fact expressed himself that way, Quine would have no ground for

complaining: Pegasus is not actual = Pegasus is not a spatio-temporal object, and that – whether it does or does not share the same logical structure as ‘the Parthenon is not red’ – is unobjectionable. What Quine imputes to his fictional Wyman is the error of taking existence to be an attribute, an error which Kant taught us to be wary of. If any realist, real or fictitious, falls into that pitfall it is not my business to defend him, but the error is not a necessary ingredient of the realist position.

Quine says, “If spatio-temporal reference is lacking when we affirm the existence of the cube root of 27, this is simply because a cube root is not a spatio-temporal kind of thing ...” (p. 33). Actual instances of the cube root of 27 are certainly spatio-temporal. If Quine maintains that the cube root of 27 is not spatio-temporal, then he is not referring to instances of the cube root of 27. What else then can he be referring to as existing but the idea of 3? And if the idea of 3 exists, why not other ideas? (I would not say that the number 3 ‘exists’, but here I am following Quine’s usage.) Or are the denizens of the realm of ideas subject to a caste system? It appears then that we have need to be reminded of Parmenides’ reprimand to Socrates in Plato’s *Parmenides*: “... you are still young, Socrates, and philosophy has not yet taken hold of you so firmly as I believe it will some day. You will not despise any of these objects then; but at present your youth makes you still pay attention to what the world will think” (130e, tr. Cornford).

Quine’s cruder McX might pass for a Platonist. The subtler Wyman is one of those sharp modern intellects that have fallen into the maze of Analytic philosophy. So, to draw a distinction between existence and subsistence without addressing the real problem — this, as Quine rightly says, is merely an obfuscation of the issues. Quine responds by giving away the term ‘existence’ and tightening his grip on ‘is’ (p. 33). Does this help? Not as long as we keep turning our back on what is real. I therefore pass lightly over Quine’s arguments against Wyman as I am not concerned to defend Wyman’s position. Moreover, I concede him ‘existence’ as well as ‘is’: all that exists is out there in the world and nothing is (if Quine will have it that way) but what is in the objective world. I am concerned with what is real, and what is real does not exist anywhere in the world but is a living moment

in creative intelligence. (Again I have to refer the reader to Book Two of my *Let Us Philosophize*.)

#### IV

Quine next (pp. 34-35) opens fire on the doctrine of the meaninglessness of contradictions. He has no use for the concept of meaninglessness because in the first place he has no use for meaning. He concedes that a statement may be meaningful; but he empties the concession of all meaning by refusing to admit the meaning behind the meaningfulness. And why won't he admit meanings? Because he is concerned to exclude the mind that is the matrix and fount of meanings. Let all our attention be directed to the objective, the existent, the given actuality. What about the mind? The mind is nothing but the neural happenings. The activity, the creativity that makes the neural happenings happen — that, in my Platonic version of the tale, is above and beyond existence and is what I call reality.

I fail to see how Quine's introduction of Russell's descriptions helps. We are told that by changing a 'name' into a 'description' we remove 'the burden of objective reference' from the 'name' to 'words'. But before Russell decreed that we should draw a distinction between 'names' and 'descriptions' did any sensible person ever think that Pegasus or a round square referred to anything but a jumble of forms? (I would not put Pegasus and a round square in the same class; here I am merely echoing Russell and Quine.)

What does all the fuss about descriptions come down to? Descriptions turn a common-language statement into a formula that logicians favour. But when we speak of 'the thing that is-Pegasus' or 'the thing that pegasizes' (p. 36) and when we move forward and say, 'there is a thing that pegasizes and that thing is not', are we not still speaking of a thing that is not? Descriptions, logical symbolism, and mathematical logic are all good techniques for facilitating complex operations of a certain kind, just as algebra is good for facilitating complex operations of a certain kind, but nothing beyond this.

Quine says, “Neither we nor Wyman nor McX have been contending, thus far, about the being or nonbeing of universals, but rather about that of Pegasus” (p. 36). Since neither Wyman nor McX could for a moment have thought of Pegasus as somehow physical, how could the contention have been about anything but the idea of Pegasus? The idea of Pegasus may not, technically, qualify for inclusion in the class of universals, but, however we define universals, I would say that the being or nonbeing of universals is included in the problem of the being or nonbeing of ideas. And in dealing with universals, the fruitful question is not whether roundness is or is not, but what we mean when we say that roundness is.

Quine says, “If in terms of pegasizing we can interpret the name ‘Pegasus’ as a description subject to Russell’s theory of descriptions, then we have disposed of the old notion that Pegasus cannot be said not to be without presupposing that in some sense Pegasus is” (p. 36). But does Russell’s theory truly do away with the inevitability of accepting that Pegasus somehow must be if we are to be able to say that it is not? How can we speak of any *x* without supposing that that *x* somehow is, has some kind of being, has a what? — and that is the real issue. Quine is concerned to deny the what because he is concerned to deny meaning, and he is concerned to deny meaning because he would not admit the reality of the mind that means the meaning.

Quine tells us that the supposition that “we could not meaningfully affirm a statement of the form ‘So-and-so is not’, with a simple or descriptive noun in place of ‘so-and-so’, unless so-and-so is, ... is now seen to be quite generally groundless, since the singular noun in question can always be expanded into a singular description, ... and then analyzed out *à la* Russell” (p. 36). But is this not a confusion of ontology with logic? A description gives us a counter that can be conveniently manipulated according to rule within its artificial universe. This is logic. But is not ‘description’ a relative term? Must not a description necessarily be a description of something? And the whole controversy is about the nature of that something and in what kind of world it has its being. This is ontology. But again I say that is not the problem I am concerned with. I am concerned with affirming the reality of

the meaning behind the meaningfulness and of the living creative mind in which alone the meaning has its reality.

The difference between ‘the present King of Sweden’ and ‘the present King of France’ is not that the first is about a particular thing and the other (duly reformulated) is a general statement, but that the first is about a physical thing and the other (even after reformulation) about a fiction. And the fiction is an entity with a character, however blurred, hazy, or schematic that character may be. The translation of ‘the present King of France’ into a Russellian description does not solve the problem of nonbeing. The problem, if a problem it is, was adequately resolved by Plato in the *Sophist*.

Of course, the wizards of mathematical logic can so define and manipulate their symbols as to produce a formula which can be taken to state that description-x is not without entailing that noun-x is. This is perfect logic. But how can I speak of description-x without having the idea x? Of course the idea x is banned from the formula and banned from the perfectly sterilized world of symbolic logic. But can we – living human beings – breathe in that sterilized world? The equations and formulae of mathematical logicians behave themselves because they are drained of all life and all meaning. Meaningful propositions are always roguish because the creative energy of life and reality is in their heart.

Quine assures us that “there is a gulf between meaning and naming” (p. 37). He goes on to say, “... confusion of meaning with naming no doubt helped engender [McX’s] absurd notion that Pegasus is an idea, a mental entity. ... But what sorts of things are meanings?” Here is the crux of the whole affair. Quine is prepared to acknowledge that there is a gulf between naming and meaning provided that meanings are nothing. So, there are no meanings. I have to reiterate that I am not siding with the fictional McX or the fictional Wyman or any of the non-fictional pundits they stand for. Clearly they share Quine’s basic outlook: for anything to be is to be an object. Locke and his school taught us that: hence ideas (meanings) have to be objective or they are not. One party has to make room for idea-objects in the mind and the other party easily shows that this is nonsensical. That the mind, as mind, is all reality and no actuality does not occur to them. The

theory of unactualized possibilities tries to eat its cake and have it: the possibilities are out there and yet are nothing. And none of the parties really cares about the reality of the mind or of all of the things Socrates died for and Plato lived for.

What does Frege's example of the Evening Star and the Morning Star show? A thing can be seen in different contexts. When I speak of the Evening Star I am speaking of a total situation, meaning and naming one thing; when I speak of the Morning Star I am speaking of another total situation, meaning and naming another one thing; when I speak of the planet that is seen now as the Evening Star and then as the Morning Star, I am speaking of yet another total situation (astronomical, physical, what you will), meaning and naming one thing. The distinction introduced by Frege is theoretically useful. But, like all distinctions, it is a fiction; in fragmenting the whole it falsifies; only the whole is real.

If we speak of a name as naming something or as the name of something, then that something is a something objectively given. Thus far I am in agreement with Quine. When realists say that the name names a meaning or is the name of a meaning, they make of the meaning an objectively given thing and betray their own cause. A word may be spoken of as an entity, a thought may be spoken of as an entity, but a meaning is a moment of the active, creative intelligence that is all the reality we know, and is not a separate or separable entity but is the dimension without which the objective has no reality and the experienced whole has no being.

## V

"Now let us turn to the ontological problem of universals: the question whether there are such entities as attributes, relations, classes, numbers, functions" (p. 37). It is simply a matter of convention whether we should say such things are or are not. We are the creators of our language and our words mean what we make them mean, and, according to my way of thinking, that is all what philosophy is about: to create meanings and in creating meanings

create meaningful worlds. Now I say that such meanings – we need not even license them as entities – do not exist but are real, are not existent but are realities. (If anyone should object to the ‘are’ here, my excuse is that I did not create the English language!)

“One’s ontology is basic to the conceptual scheme by which he interprets all experiences, even the most commonplace ones” (p. 37). This is as it should be and is inevitable. It only becomes damaging when one’s fundamental concepts and principles remain unquestioned. Why, then, does Quine find fault with McX’s view? “Judged within some particular conceptual scheme – and how else is judgment possible? – an ontological statement goes without saying, standing in need of no separate justification at all” (p. 37). So what was all the fuss about? As Heidegger says, “Die ‘Lehre’ eines Denkers ist das in seinem Sagen Ungesagte” (*Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*). The true purport of Quine’s theory is not in what he says but in what he leaves unsaid. The whole drift of his argument is to leave out, to sweep under the carpet, that other world, the world of subjective reality.

Quine seems to allow that, from the point of view, anyway, of McX’s conceptual scheme, ‘There is an attribute’ follows from ‘There are red houses, red roses, red sunsets’ (p. 37). It seems then that Quine does not find anything wrong with McX’s logic, but only with his ontology. And here is what I find wrong with the whole modern outlook in philosophy. Quine thinks McX’s ontology wrong, as if there were one and only one ontology that is true. What we need to end all fruitless controversy in philosophy is to acknowledge that all philosophical thinking is mythical, creating useful, meaningful myths that are none the less myths.

“One may admit that there are red houses, roses, and sunsets, but deny, except as a popular and misleading manner of speaking, that they have anything in common” (p. 38). What does this really amount to? That only particular things are. Again, as a matter of linguistic convention, have it whichever way you will. But what I think it necessary to emphasize is that the character of every particular thing, even of every unique single thing, as intelligible, is part of the intelligible world, which is the only reality we know — all the reality we know.

What Quine's position boils down to is a proposal that we limit the term 'is' to what is objective or physical or whatever. Well and good: for myself I say that the given exists while meaning is real but does not exist. We can agree to reverse these terms at will, as long as we are clear as to what convention we follow. I will have no quarrel with anyone on that count. My complaint is that Quine says that what is, is only what is objective, and stops there. Plato says, What is out there is visible and sensible and audible and divisible and changeable and has all the characteristics you want in your solid world but what is real is what cannot be seen or touched, and this invisible world is the more important of the two.

The 'occult entities' posited by McX are only 'occult' when 'entities' is taken as equivalent to 'existents', an error which some realists may have fallen into, but which does not justify the nominalists in banning the whole world of (Platonic) reality and usurping the words real and reality for their world of givenness and objective actuality.

Again when Quine speaks of McX trying "to impose his ontology of universals on us" (p. 38) we see what is wrong with all philosophical controversy: it assumes that one theory can be definitively true and others false. When we realize that all theory is fiction, we see that different theories give us different perspectival descriptions of the Truth which cannot be encompassed by any determinate formulation. "McX cannot argue that predicates ... must be regarded as names each of a single universal entity in order that they be meaningful at all" (p. 38). Quine insists that "being a name of something is a much more special feature than being meaningful" (p. 38). Well and good, but this is so only if we choose to understand naming as implying reference or attachment to objective actuality. But we are still left with meaning and being meaningful. Let us banish meaning from our ontology; do that in due form and nobody will be able to challenge you, but that leaves you with an anaemic ontology: we still have to find place for meaning in our world.

I would rather say that being a name of something is the corruption of being meaningful: to be meaningful is to be a reality; to name is to split the reality into a name and a thing named, and in splitting the reality to falsify it.



Quine feels “no reluctance toward refusing to admit meanings” without thereby denying “that words and sentences are meaningful” (p. 38). What he objects to is that McX “construes meaningfulness as the having ... of some abstract entity which he calls a meaning” (p. 38). For Quine the fact that a given linguistic utterance is meaningful (significant) means an ultimate and irreducible matter of fact (p. 38). So, while Quine’s McX insists on splitting the reality into two entities, which thereby become existents, Quine himself sanctions the split but is content with keeping the this, jettisoning the what. Both of them rob us of the reality. McX, intending to champion subjectivity concentrates on its content, while for Quine nothing is there but the content. The active, creative subject – the mind – is negated in both stances.

“I remain free to maintain that the fact that a given linguistic utterance is meaningful (or significant, ...) is an ultimate and irreducible matter of fact; or, I may undertake to analyze it in terms directly of what people do in the presence of the linguistic utterance in question and other utterances similar to it” (p. 38). If this is not reductionism, what is? Again “The problem of explaining these adjectives ‘significant’ and ‘synonymous’ with some degree of clarity and rigor – preferably, as I see it, in terms of behavior – is as difficult as it is important. But the explanatory value of special and irreducible intermediary entities called meanings is surely illusory” (p. 39). If we split the meaningful whole into meaningfulness and meaning and then take meaningfulness as all there is, that leaves the meaning empty. Quine is effectively abolishing the mind behind the meaning, that is his intent and purpose.

## VI

Quine sums up: we can use singular terms significantly without presupposing that there are *entities* which those terms name; we can use general terms such as predicates without conceding them to be names of abstract *entities*; we can view utterances as significant without countenancing a realm of *entities* called meanings (p. 39). I have italicized the word ‘entities’ in these sentences because that, in my view, is the crux of

the problem. Both nominalists and realists talk of entities: for nominalists only physical things are entities; for realists ideas are mental entities; both are oblivious of the realm of reality which is beyond all existents.

“At this point McX begins to wonder whether there is any limit at all to our ontological immunity. Does nothing we say commit us to the assumption of universals or other entities which we may find unwelcome?” (p. 39.) In McX’s place I would be more generous than his creator makes him. I would say: You have all the immunity you want. Nothing commits you to the existence of anything beside existents. I do not maintain the existence of ideas but their reality. They are secure in the bosom of Berkeley’s God, in Plato’s heaven of Forms, in the mind of simple human beings: God, the world of Forms, the mind, are all equally myths but also all equally real. They are all the reality we know, all else is ephemeral shadow.

We can have a perfectly consistent ontology and a highly efficacious system of semantics, but we may still be faced by the question: Do our ontology and our semantics give us access to what is of importance to us as human beings?

“The variables of quantification, ‘something’, ‘nothing’, ‘everything’, range over our whole ontology” (p. 39). That’s it: something, nothing, everything: so characteristic of our age! We live in a world of things, things that have crowded out all ideals, values, and dreams. The real harm done by all the wranglings of realists and nominalists is not in the endless and futile rehearsal of riddles unriddled long ago, but in the consequent oblivion of the reality of what is real. The modern mind is gorged with the actual and the factual and the objective and is famished for want of anything that is real.

Quine says, “The issue is clearer now than of old, because we now have a more explicit standard whereby to decide what ontology a given theory or form of discourse is committed to: a theory is committed to those and only those entities to which the bound variables of the theory must be capable of referring in order that the affirmations made in the theory be true” (p. 40). The issue is indeed clear. Quine is only concerned with what entities there are in the objective world. I readily agree that the only entities there are in the world are such as are reducible to the particulars that make up the

objective world. But that whole objective world has no reality but in the active intelligence that does the referring.

In Quine's own words, the nominalist-realist controversy could be translated "into a semantical controversy about words and what to do with them" (p. 41). Yet Quine insists this "is no indication that the question is linguistic." Surely it is not merely linguistic: one's language determines one's universe of discourse, and one's universe of discourse determines the world one lives in. But I insist, there is no factual question beyond the linguistic one: it is meaningless to ask, Are there or are there not universals? We can ask, Shall we or shall we not agree to say that there are universals? Beyond the linguistic issue the problem is not one of facts but of values: What kind of world shall we choose to live in?

"Our ontology is determined once we have fixed upon the over-all conceptual scheme which is to accommodate science in the broadest sense; and the considerations which determine a reasonable construction of any part of that conceptual scheme ... are not different from the considerations which determine a reasonable construction of the whole" (p. 42). This is sound methodology, but it lies without the sphere of metaphysics, completely leaving out the question of reality — what Plato meant by reality.

"Physical objects are postulated entities which round out and simplify our account of the flux of experience, just as the introduction of irrational numbers simplifies laws of arithmetic" (p. 42). Exactly; the concept of a physical object, no less than the concept of an irrational number, is a creation of the mind. We make use of such concepts and by their help the things in the natural world become meaningful. The meaning is not in the objective world but in the mind: it is engendered by the mind and conferred on the world by the mind.

## VII

Quine's essay teems with chimeras: Pegasus, the round square cupola on Berkeley College, the present King of France, not to speak of McX and

Wyman. In a world so peopled, how can we hope to have a glimpse of reality? Why should we argue about the existence of Pegasus and centaurs and unicorns? Why not ask, as Plato did, “Does justice exist or not?” We can then quickly put the terminological question behind our backs, agreeing one way or another when and where to apply the terms ‘existence’, ‘being’, ‘reality’, etc., and attend to the more important question, whether all the galaxies and all the elements of nature are more meaningful and more valuable than our ideas and our ideals or the other way round. ‘Pegasus exists’, ‘Pegasus does not exist’: both statements are true depending on the linguistic protocol you choose to adopt. But the idea of justice, whether it is instantiated in the actual world or not, whether we legitimize the application of the term ‘exist’ to it or not, is what gives a human being her or his worth. This is the substance. All the theoretical controversies are a Gordian knot that can be severed at one blow: it is all a question of linguistic usage and of point of view. And no single statement is ever absolutely and definitively true, but this is another story.

Meanings are the stuff of the intelligible world just as phenomena are the stuff of the sensible world: meanings are the substance of experience, of the experiencing mind, just as phenomena are the substance of the experienced world. Or, to put it differently – for, following in the footsteps of the great Plato I have no scruple about presenting my thought in various garb, because, after all, no determinate formulation of thought is ever definitive –, on the plane of human being we live in a universe of discourse constituted by ideas creatively engendered by the mind. That is reality.

## THE *EUTHYPHRO* AS A PHILOSOPHICAL WORK

[This essay was written for a projected issue of *The Examined Life Online Journal* devoted to the theme “What is a philosophical work?” Sadly, the journal ceased publication and the projected theme issue never saw the light. A shorter version of the essay appeared in *Philosophy Pathways*.]

### Abstract:

*Euthyphro* Few will question the title of Plato’s *Euthyphro* to being accounted a philosophical work. I examine this short dialogue to find out what gives it that title. I find that it neither propounds a thesis, nor draws inferences from premises, nor establishes any conclusions. I suggest that a philosophical work has a dual function: (a) critical, examining preconceived notions and prejudices, enabling us to look with clearer eyes into our own minds; (b) creative, offering ideas and ideal patterns under which the chaotic content of our experience gains meaningfulness.

### Preface:

What is a philosophical work? This is a question to which there can be a myriad of reasonable answers. So without claiming to give the one right answer, I will try to offer an answer by examining Plato's *Euthyphro*, whose title to being accounted a philosophical work will not be questioned by many.

In doing so I may be imitating the foolish interlocutors in the Socratic dialogues who, when asked: What is, say, courage?, give for an answer something like: Standing firm in battle is courage. So, asked: What is a philosophical work?, I will answer: the *Euthyphro* is a philosophical work. So much of foolishness I ask to be permitted me. But I will not stop there. I will go on to show what, in my view, makes the *Euthyphro* a philosophical work.(1)

I will first give an Outline of the Dialogue, then an Analysis, followed by Conclusions. The *Euthyphro* is one of the shortest, perhaps the shortest, of Plato's dialogues, and its concentration may be an aid to the purpose of our examination.

In form the piece is a simple drama in one act, one scene, with only two characters. Yet a work of Plato's, however simple in form and structure, is never 'simple' in intent or in philosophical content. Plato always weaves various aims, themes and dimensions into his work. The *Euthyphro* is no exception. In the following summary and analysis I follow a single thread of the rich fabric.

#### Outline:

Socrates comes to the Stoa of the Archon Basileus to meet the indictment brought up against him by Meletus. There he meets with the soothsayer Euthyphro who has come to lay charges against his own father who had caused the death of a man without due process of law. Euthyphro proceeds against his father to remove the pollution thus incurred. The impiety in failing to do so would outweigh the impiety of acting against his own aged father. Euthyphro is fully confident that his expert knowledge of theology makes it possible for him to decide what is pious and what impious in such a

situation.

What, then, Socrates asks, is piety? Euthyphro offers his own proceeding as an example. That, Socrates explains, does not answer his question. Next Euthyphro says that piety is whatever is approved of by the gods and impiety whatever is not approved of by them. Socrates reminds Euthyphro that he has spoken of conflicts and dissensions among the gods. If there is no consensus among the gods, how can their discordant opinions help us know what is pious?

Well, says Euthyphro, what is approved of by all the gods is pious. Good, but is that which is approved of by the gods pious because the gods approve of it, or do they approve of it because it is pious? To the simple-minded Euthyphro, the pious is pious because the gods approve of it. Socrates shows that, logically, the statement fails to answer the question.

Socrates volunteers to help out: What if we consider piety as part of righteousness? What part? The part, says Euthyphro, that has to do with serving the gods. Various meanings of service are considered, none of which is found to be satisfactory.

Euthyphro has to attend to his business and excuses himself, leaving the discussion in this inconclusive condition.

Analysis:

The critical part of the dialogue begins with Socrates saying to Euthyphro: Tell me, then, what do you say piety is and what impiety? (5c, 5d.) What are we to understand by – what do we mean by – piety? As I have often reiterated in my writings, Socrates does not ask for a definition, but wants his interlocutor to look within his own mind and try to make out what he understands by the concept under discussion.

Euthyphro answers that to do what he is doing is piety. As evidence he cites the action of Zeus against his father Cronus and what Cronus in turn had done to his own father. Socrates is incredulous of such tales, but that is not what he wishes to examine right now. He is content to register his incredulity and lead his partner back to the question under examination.

By his initial answer Euthyphro has shown that, like most interlocutors in the Socratic dialogues, he has no idea what it is to examine a concept apart from the concrete instances in which it is exemplified. At this point Socrates tries to clarify the distinction between the various perceptible instances of a certain character and the idea that we have in our mind of that character, the distinction between a sensible realm of things in the world surrounding us and an intelligible realm of ideas in our mind which render the things meaningful. He asks Euthyphro to tell him of that one character which makes all things pious pious.

The creative concept of the distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible is Socrates' original and profound contribution to philosophical thought and is pivotal to the whole of Plato's philosophy. Socrates nowhere tries to 'prove' this distinction or to 'prove' the 'existence' of the intelligible realm. He proclaims the distinction and the reality of the intelligible realm, and in all he says and does he manifests the value and meaning with which our life becomes infused in the light of the intelligible.

Euthyphro says that what is agreeable to the gods is pious, what is disagreeable to them impious (6e-7a). Even if we found no other fault with this statement, still, believing what Euthyphro does believe about the wars and quarrels among the gods, it would not help us know what is pious and what impious: what pleases one god may displease another (7a-8b). Clearly, the ideas in Euthyphro's mind do not form a consistent, coherent whole; they clash as much as his gods do.

Technically, this is an argument *ad hominem*, which is legitimate within proper limits, and Socrates does not make much of it. Indeed, for Plato its value resides more in revealing the absurdity of the popular conception of the gods than in disclosing the insufficiency of the statement proposed.

Prompted by Socrates, Euthyphro accepts an amendment to his statement: what all the gods like is pious, what all of them hate is impious (9d). Let us see: shall we say that the pious is loved by the gods because it is pious or that it is pious because it is loved by the gods (10a)? This is a knotty question that Euthyphro cannot easily comprehend. It is also a question with a tremendously profound dimension, which Plato is content to leave



hovering here because in the present context it could not be dealt with in a manner befitting its profundity. Still, the prophetic notion of the autonomy of morality, which was to be the core of Kant's moral philosophy, is here clearly hinted at.

Socrates, leaving aside the profounder problem, explains the logic of the question: we speak of carrying and being carried, leading and being led, seeing and being seen. So also being loved is one thing and loving another. In short, what is carried, led, seen, loved, is in such a state because of some action to which it is subject. To say that a thing is in a state of being loved by the gods is to say that the gods love it. In other words, it is to say that something is happening to it. That is not to say what it is. The statement, then, that the pious is pious because it is loved by the gods tells us of an accident to which it is subject, but does not tell us what it is.

We shall say then that the gods love what is pious because it is pious. In other words, the gods love piety because of what it is. But then we are back to the question: What is piety?

Euthyphro confesses to his being at a loss what more to say and Socrates offers to help. We will readily agree that what is pious is righteous (*dikaion*). Well, is all that is righteous pious, or shall we say that, while all that is pious is righteous, part of what is righteous is pious and part of some other character? (11e-12a.) Once more, the question is too complex for Euthyphro and Socrates has again to explain a point of logic.

No modern student has any problem with such a question, thanks to the work done by philosophers. Philosophers create notions, distinctions, ways of looking at things, of examining questions, that become an integral part of the mental equipment of cultured humans. We very easily forget that these tools are gifts of individual creative thinkers.

Socrates then suggests that the pious is part of the righteous. What part of righteousness is piety? Euthyphro says that piety is that part of righteousness that has to do with attending to the gods; the rest of righteousness covers our dealings with humans (12e). Well, what do we mean by this tendance or service to the gods? We make use of this notion of tendance when we speak of tending to horses or cattle. We are then speaking of a special skill or

branch of knowledge. Euthyphro thinks this may well be true of piety as tendance to the gods (13b). But in the case of attending to horses or cows the purpose and the result is to benefit the horses and cows and improve them. This cannot be the case with attending to the gods (13c).

Euthyphro suggests a different analogy. The service to the gods that is piety is of the kind rendered by slaves to their masters (13d). It is then some kind of assistance. A slave assists his master in performing work aiming at some good. What then is the good work in the performance of which the pious assist the gods? (13e.)

Many and fine are the works of the gods. But what is the chief work in the performance of which they make use of the assistance of the pious? Euthyphro says that when someone knows how to gratify the gods in offering sacrifices and prayers, that amounts to piety, and that secures the wellbeing of individuals and of society (14a-b). That, Socrates finds, comes down to offering gifts to the gods and asking favours in return (14c-d). To ask properly would be to ask for what we need; to give properly would be to give what the recipients need. Piety would be a species of trading carried out between humans and gods (14d-e). The goods that we may receive from the gods are obvious, but what benefit do they derive from our gifts? Nothing but honour and reverence and gratification. Then piety is simply pleasing to the gods. We have thus returned full circle to the view that piety is what is pleasing to the gods, which we have already found unsatisfactory (15a-b). We should go back and start the investigation anew. But Euthyphro is in a hurry and has to go.

Conclusions:

To my mind, what makes of the *Euthyphro* a philosophical work is precisely that it is not anything of what most people expect of a philosophical work. It does not advance a thesis; it does not draw inferences from a proposition or set of propositions; it does not establish a theory or present arguments in support of a hypothesis.

What do we find in this little philosophical work? A word that is part of

our common vocabulary, that we use and think we understand, is examined to see what meaning or meanings and what associations of meanings it evokes for us: a piece of the furniture of our mental chamber is turned this way and that way to see how well-wrought it is and how well it sits with the rest of the furniture in the chamber.(2)

A philosophical work, true to Socratic dialectic, does not seek to arrive at a definite conclusion, or to prove or uphold a thesis or set of theses, but to subject one's own and others' beliefs, presuppositions, and accepted notions to searching examination, to illumine obscure nooks and crannies in one's own mind and others' minds. The end is not to arrive at conclusions, but to help us gaze within ourselves with clearer eyes.

F. M. Cornford has this to say of the dialectical treatment of a subject:

“[A modern reader] will readily understand that dialectic means a co-operative inquiry carried on in conversation between two or more minds that are equally bent, not on getting the better of the argument, but on arriving at the truth. A tentative suggestion (‘hypothesis’) put forward by one speaker is corrected and improved until the full meaning is clearly stated. The criticism that follows may end in complete rejection or lead on to another suggestion which (if the examination has been skilfully conducted) ought to approach nearer to the truth.”(3)

This is a good description of the procedure of dialectical discourse, which is basically true of all genuine philosophical discourse however conducted. My only reservation is about the phrases ‘arriving at the truth’ and ‘to approach nearer to the truth’. There is no objective truth to be arrived at. The end of proper philosophical discourse is to achieve a fuller awareness of our presuppositions, a clearer understanding of the fundamental notions and principles on which we base our judgements. Those fundamental notions and principles cannot be discovered in anything external to the mind and are not amenable to proof. To argue with a view to establishing their truth or

revealing their falsity is vain. They rest in their own self-evidence. The question to be raised with regard to them is not a question of truth or falsity, but one of value and sufficiency and viability. The critical question to be posed in assessing a philosophical view should be: What kind of world does that view give us to live in? What kind of life does it offer? What level of intelligibility does it secure for us.

Does this mean that philosophical thought has no positive content whatever? No. What I am saying is (and I believe this was Plato's position too) that it can rest in no definitive formulation whatever. The searching examination is the whole of the philosophical act: that perpetuated act is a constant affirmation and realization of the reality of human intelligence and the integrity of the human mind. That is our whole reality and the ground of our proper worth. That reality finds creative expression in ideals and principles and theoretical models, rooted in our reality and 'true' in so far as they are expressions of that reality. But their particular formulations are necessarily always relative and contingent. Taken as final and absolute, as 'true', they turn into dogma and superstition. That is why they have to be constantly re-examined, put under the light-rays of new questions, revealing the inherent insufficiency of all determinate thought, that being the critical function of philosophy.

And since the expression of our inner reality in ideal formulations does not represent or seek to represent any outer, objective, actuality, the concept of truth is irrelevant and inapplicable to it. That is what I mean by saying that all creative philosophical thinking is mythical and oracular. It has nothing to do with facts; its whole concern is with values, the values of goodness, beauty, and, no!, not truth, but truthfulness.

The philosophical endeavour soars on two wings: the oracular and the dialectical.(4) The two are complementary and no genuine philosophy can be without a share of both, but a particular work of philosophy, or even the bulk of a particular philosopher's work, can be either principally dialectic or principally oracular. In the *Euthyphro* we can see the dialectical dimension clearly illustrated, but we can also glimpse the oracular dimension, not only in the ideal of God or the gods as necessarily good but also and markedly in

the principle that moral values must be autonomous. This was the insight that formed the core of Kant's moral philosophy.

Socrates' life-mission was to combat *amathia* ('ignorance') by helping his interlocutors examine themselves. *Amathia*, the evil of which the Socratic elenchus rids the soul, is not lack of knowledge: in its milder variety, it is obscure and confused thought; in its more pernicious variety, it is 'disknowledge' instilled into the soul by bad upbringing and bad education, consisting in false values and notions and beliefs. But the process is not purely negative. In the philosophical dialectic (of which the elenchus is simply the characteristically Socratic mode) the philosopher introduces, actually creates, concepts, conceptual distinctions, ideal patterns, which expand, enrich, deepen, the capacity of the mind to infuse meaning into the givennesses of experience. Such concepts, conceptual distinctions, and ideal patterns, are not derived from the outer world and therefore cannot be in any way verified or proved. Again, they are not 'knowledge' imparted to the learner. If the learner receives them as factual knowledge they turn into dogmatic superstitions, a new *amathia*. When the learner sees them as creative developments of her/his own mind, they become forms of intelligibility under which the mind can translate more of the chaos of the givennesses of experience into the cosmos of intelligence.

#### Endnotes

(1) In the fifth of my Excursions into the Dialogues of Plato, "The Argument of the *Republic*", available on my Website: [www.Back-to-Socrates.com](http://www.Back-to-Socrates.com), I give an ampler answer by examining the *chef-d'oeuvre* of Plato's. This Excursion has been incorporated in *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005) as chapter 7.

(2) I hope no one will conclude from this that I align myself with the Ordinary Language school of thought: there may be points of contact, but there are radical differences between their outlook and mine.

(3) F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (1935), p.30.

(4) For a fuller elucidation of this view, see "Philosophy as Prophecy", the first essay in this collection.

## MUST VALUES BE OBJECTIVE?

[Appeared first in *Philosophy Pathways*,  
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/~ptpdlp/newsletter/>]

Must values be objective? The answer to this question of course depends on what we mean by objectivity. It might appear that the simplest definition would be that the objective is what is independent of the subject. But quite apart from the consideration that any line drawn to separate the subject from what lies beyond the subject must be *ad hoc*, that definition and the very question which gave rise to it apparently assume that only what is independent of the subject is real. I believe that the problem of the objectivity of values is a pseudo-problem generated by a false conception of reality.

If reality is not to be found in what is outside the mind but in what is within the mind, then values will be real not so much in spite of their being subjective but precisely in virtue of their being subjective. And they can be real and everlasting and eternal – that is, in a significant sense absolute – in spite of being variable in their particular formulations. In other words, the relativity of particular realizations of value does not contradict the absolute reality of the source of all value. Defenders of the absolute reality of values defeat their own cause when they accept to fight for it on the terms and under the presuppositions laid down by the prevailing empiricist attitudes.

In what follows I seek to clarify and justify the position outlined in the preceding two paragraphs. I must beg the reader's indulgence for the repetitiveness, as I am daring the Sisyphean task of challenging an inveterate

and nigh-sacrosanct tradition in philosophical thinking. Military people know that if you let the enemy choose the battleground, you have practically lost the battle. I believe that defenders of absolute values defeat their own cause by accepting to carry out the discussion in terms of the empiricist conception of what is real.

In the *Sophist* Plato distinguishes two types of *Weltanschauung* resting, it would seem, on two types of mentality or personality. Plato designates them the Gods and the Giants. Let me quote here this passage, for I believe this is the true basis on which the problem can be resolved:

STR. What we shall see is something like a Battle of Gods and Giants going on between them over their quarrel about reality.

THEAET. How so?

STR. One party is trying to drag everything down to earth out of heaven and the unseen, literally grasping rocks and trees in their hands; for they lay hold upon every stock and stone and strenuously affirm that real existence belongs only to that which can be handled and offers resistance to the touch. They define reality as the same thing as body, and as soon as one of the opposite party asserts that anything without a body is real, they are utterly contemptuous and will not listen to another word.

THEAET. The people you describe are certainly a formidable crew. I have met quite a number of them before now.

STR. Yes, and accordingly their adversaries are very wary in defending their position somewhere in the heights of the unseen, maintaining with all their force that true reality consists in intelligible and bodiless Forms. In the clash of argument they shatter and pulverise the bodies which their opponents wield, and what those others allege to be true reality they call, not real being, but a sort of moving process of becoming. On this issue an interminable battle is always going on between the two camps. (*Sophist*, 246a-c, tr. F. M.

Cornford.)

It is an observable fact that rules and standards of acceptable conduct differ from society to society and from age to age. Thus these rules and standards may be described as time-relative and place-relative. This indicates that they are formed by the human beings living in the respective places and at the respective times. Thus they may be described as subjective. All of this is indisputable. Now those rules and standards presumably embody certain values, certain ends seen as desirable. Then the question is posed in some such form as this: "Are those values and ends (underlying the rules and standards of conduct) devised by individuals and/or groups, and therefore unnatural and time- and place-relative? Or are they objective, with a foundation in reality?" Once this formulation is accepted, the case is lost. For, as we have already admitted, there is plenty of evidence that values – particular exemplifications of values – are time- and place-relative and are the product of individuals and particular societies. But who said that that makes them unreal? Who said that the real is what is not grounded in the mind? Of course we know who said that: the materialists and the empiricists have been dinning it into our ears, from Democritus and Leucippus to their present-day successors. But the problem is that those who should know better are accepting these presuppositions without question.

The question, when thus formulated, involves a fatal fallacy and conceals a vicious trap. Defenders of absolute values step into the trap blindfolded when they accept this formulation without question. So the controversy proceeds on the presumption, first, that there is a radical opposition between objective and subjective, and, second, that objective means real while subjective means unreal. So, when a writer asserts that 'morality is a purely subjective phenomenon', that is taken to mean that there is no ultimate standard of right and wrong in morality, or, in other words, that there is nothing above and beyond the conventions forming the body of any particular moral system.

To be objective is taken to mean to be external to human beings, to be independent of mind. And according to the presumed definition of



‘objective’, this is interpreted as meaning that to be real is to be independent of mind, and that the things of the mind are unreal. Defenders of absolute values must cut the Gordian knot by declaring that it is the subjective that is real and that the subject (mind) is the abode of all reality.

By my juxtaposition of subjectivism and relativism I may be thought to be confusing the distinction between subjective and objective with the distinction between relative and absolute. I answer that, quite on the contrary, I am trying to show that the problem arises from such a confusion. We have three distinct sets of opposed terms: relative-absolute, subjective-objective, and internal-external. The terms in one of these sets do not necessarily have the same correlation to the terms in another of the sets in every context.

In the controversy relating to moral values, moral judgements are admitted by all parties to be relative to time and place. Thus they are not absolute in the sense of holding for all times and places. This is taken to mean that they are subjective in the sense of mind-dependent, which is all right in this context. Hence they are opposed to objective. That too is all right when subjective and objective are correlated to internal-to-the-person and external-to-the-person respectively. But error steps in when ‘objective’ is at the same time equated with ‘real’ as opposed to unreal, illusory, and so on. (All of these terms are very fluid, meaning various things for different thinkers and in different contexts. But for the purposes of this essay I do not find it necessary to explore these differences in detail.)

I think I am not unjust in laying the blame for this error on empiricism. Hume, who consolidated the empiricism of Locke, may be regarded as responsible for that understanding of subjectivism that can easily lead to the view that moral values are not real. And it was Hume who gave possibly the first and definitely the most sharp-cut formulation of the question in the faulty form which I consider the source of all the confusion we are in. In the *Treatise* Hume writes, “But can there be any difficulty in proving that vice and virtue are not matters of fact, whose existence we can infer by reason?” Hume speaks of ‘matters of fact’ and of ‘existence’, presumably as verifiable by empirical means. Certainly virtue and vice as such – what

Socrates/Plato called ‘*auto to ...*’ – are not ‘matters of fact’ and certainly their ‘existence’ in the ‘objective’ world can neither be inferred by reason nor be detected in any other way. But this is not the question. The question for moral philosophy should be: Are virtue and vice things whose significance for the meaning and value of human life can be shown by reason? In other words, Are they things that have reality in the moral sphere? Hume himself in the same context affirms, “Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness; and if these be favourable to virtue, and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour.” I am not here evaluating Hume’s moral philosophy and Hume may possibly have been grossly wronged by his followers, even the best among them; but in any case it is not his affirmation of the ‘reality’ of our sentiments – whatever he may have meant by that – but his denial of the factuality and the existence of virtue and vice which those followers emphasize, to say the least. Or have Hume’s followers not wronged him after all? For when Hume goes on, still in the same context, to draw his classic distinction between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ – however just and important the distinction may be – he seems to have left the ‘ought’ hanging without any support in reality; it was, as far as he cared to show, ‘subjective’ in the most shadowy sense of the term. After all, he did expect his distinction to “subvert all the vulgar systems of morality [probably meaning all systems that are not ‘scientific’ according to his criteria]; and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely [= purely] on the relations of objects [= is not objective], nor is perceived by reason [= is not an analytical truth].” (All the above quotes from the *Treatise*, III (i) 1.)

The error of the advocates of absolute values whom Hume implicitly and Humeans explicitly criticize for proceeding from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ does not lie in their unjustifiably grounding ‘ought’ in ‘is’, but in thinking that they have to do so, that they have to ground moral principles in facts. Moral principles do not depend on facts but add a metaphysical dimension to the factual. Their reality is independent of all fact; they are creative expressions of the reality that is our very being; we, as humans, have no being apart from that

reality; that reality is our metaphysical being, just as our body is the whole of our physical existence. I know that to minds schooled in the empiricist outlook that has come to dominate the modern intellect, all of this will be sheer balderdash so long as those minds take the presuppositions of that outlook to be unquestionable. I keep repeating my apparently enigmatic assertions in so many formulations in the hope that someone here or there might suspect that those presuppositions could perhaps be questioned after all.

There have been and there will be many different theories of ethics, because these theories are nothing but a conceptual re-presentation of the reality of the moral life. These theories need not be mutually contradictory any more than different landscape paintings of the same location are contradictory. A theory does not report 'facts' but creates an ideal pattern which gives intelligibility to its content. But ethical theories fall into two opposed types: outward-looking theories that look for the good in 'the world' and inward-looking theories that look for the good in 'the soul' (mind, personality). To find the good in a transcendent reality (say, God or the Form of the Good) is equivocal; it is neither a third way distinct from both the outward-looking and the inward-looking nor is it *prima facie* identifiable with the one or the other. Here we have to bring in the all-important distinction introduced by Socrates in the *Euthyphro*: if the good is good because God decrees it, then that is an outward-looking stance; if God demands the good because it is good, then that is an inward-looking affirmation of absolute value. Outward-looking theories (such as Utilitarianism, for instance) can be very helpful and even indispensable in such areas as political philosophy. But they cannot explain ultimate notions such as that of moral obligation or absolute values. And they become positively harmful when they presume to usurp the whole field and claim that they are in possession of the whole truth.

People, even when subscribing to the same general values and principles, may pursue different ends and may in any given situation make different judgements in good conscience as to what is right, what is desirable, what is beneficial. I think that this is inevitable, since in making a practical

judgement it is strictly impossible for any human being to comprehend all the relevant factors. Consequently I believe that in debating any practical issue – in politics, say, or bio-ethics – it is arrogant to try to prove one's position right; all one can do is to show one's position reasonable in that it gives their due weight to important relevant considerations. But this remark is just by the way; this is not what we are dealing with here. That we will make different judgements in a given situation means of course that any such judgement is relative and subjective. How then can we say that such a judgement may be a moral judgement, if by that we mean a judgement involving absolute values and not merely valuations in terms of expediency or conventional or legal requirements? My answer is that a judgement is moral when it is dictated by the inexorable need to preserve the integrity of the moral agent. Socrates' insistence that our highest good is our *phronêsis* (intelligence), Kant's affirmation that the only absolutely good thing is a good will, the common idea of conscience, the teaching of Jesus which is summed up in: love God (the ideal of all goodness) and love thy neighbour, all express the same insight. And I do not say that my formulation is an improvement on any of the others. It is just another expression of the same insight. Hence I affirm that moral judgements, even though their particular exemplifications are patently shot through and through with relativism and subjectivity, yet involve absolute values in being grounded in the one reality of which we have immediate knowledge, in the one value which constitutes our whole dignity and worth, in the integrity of our active, creative, intelligence.

I would draw a sharp distinction between ethical (meta-ethical, if you wish) relativism and moral relativism. I believe there will necessarily be numerous ethical theories that may be enlightening in various degrees, yet I believe there can never be any one ethical theory that cannot be shown to be defective in certain ways. That is ethical relativism (but not scepticism, because I maintain that the various theories complement and elucidate one another, and they all reveal some aspect of reality; it is believing that one theory must be true and the others false that leads to scepticism). But moral relativism denies that there are values and principles that are grounded in an

absolute reality. That relativism is death to humanity.

Advocates of moral relativism argue that morality is a subjective phenomenon and think that they have thereby shown morality to have no foundation in reality. They are permitted to get away with this because their opponents concede to them the presumption that to be objective and real is to be non-mind-dependent while to be subjective is to be a figment, a will-o'-the-wisp. This is the empiricist, physicalist, reductionist dogma that has come to dominate modern thinking, a fallacy that has been institutionalized into a foundational academic credo.

There is another ineluctable form of relativity: moral values are not real for everyone. They are only real for persons in whom humanity has come to full fruition. What are we to do about this? We know that there are people bereft of conscience; we know that there are people who are motivated by a morbidly constricted conception of self-interest. I do not think that these facts militate against the reality of moral values. These people have simply not developed into human beings; their development has been impeded or their humanity has been mutilated by certain influences. Our duty is to work for a world where all children born to the human race develop into full human beings. Should the reader object that I am not proving my case but daydreaming, I would answer that in conformity with my view of the true nature of philosophy, my aim is not to establish a factual truth but to proclaim an ideal and to offer a world view that gives meaning and value to life.

When Kant laid down the principle, “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:429, tr. Mary Gregor), he was not enunciating a demonstrable proposition, but affirming an ideal — one of the most precious treasures of our human heritage.

The error of empirical relativism does not lie in maintaining that all specific moral judgements are relative, but in denying the reality of the moral life that is the source of those judgements. That reality is the absolute value in virtue of which those particular judgements have a share in the

absolute.

I maintain that the reality of creative intelligence is the ground and fount of absolute value, which is actualized in particular, variable formulations. We can generalize from these particular formulations and enunciate maxims and principles of varying levels of universality, but only the reality of what Socrates referred to as that in us which is benefited by doing good and harmed by doing ill is absolute. The relativity and mutability of its particular manifestations no more militate against its reality than the imperfection and transience of all actual phenomena militate against the reality of an ultimate, eternal ground and source of all being, however we may name it.

## PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION

If philosophy begins in wonder as Plato tells us, we may say that religion begins in awe. These two sentiments are natural for a creature that finds itself tossed into a world that presses on it on all hands with puzzling apparitions and happenings, often frightful and as often beneficent and comforting. If these two sentiments always kept company and went hand in hand, as they should, wonder would issue in the salubrious quest of understanding, while awe would preserve the wholesome awareness of the unsounded depths beneath and beyond the apparent and ephemeral presentations of the world.

Unfortunately, however, the human mind seems to have an inbuilt proclivity to prefer the simple to the complex. Thus while a section of humans (perhaps always a minority) are moved to follow the promptings of wonder to the exclusion of any attention to the call of the sense of awe, another section (perhaps the vast majority) are overwhelmed by the sense of awe impelling them to embrace unquestioningly any promise of shelter and security. This, as I see it, is the source of the unnatural opposition of reason and faith, resulting in the damaging predicament in which humanity today finds itself, where we are faced with the choice between, on the one hand, adhering to reason in a world of worthless superficialities, and, on the other hand, nominally holding to spirituality and values in a dungeon of superstitious beliefs that perforce turn the spirituality and the values into illusionary shadows.

For a wholesome attitude to life we have to unite the wonder and the awe, to reach a philosophy that acknowledges no arbiter for its declarations but reason and at the same time clearly realizes that against the deceptive appearances and valuations of the world there is a reality for which we have the assurance of our own power of creative understanding and power of selfless love and power of responsive appreciation of beauty. These powers are the outflow of a perfection that the world outside us, in itself and by itself, cannot yield.

Faith and reason have often been represented as incompatible. Frequently also there have been attempts to reconcile them. To resolve the issue we have to be clear as to what we understand by reason and what we understand by faith. Unfortunately, in most of the heated debates revolving around this question, these two basic notions remain hazy and nebulous. We need a clear-headed conception of reason and of faith in which these, far from being incompatible or needing a compromised reconciliation, are seen to be two inseparable dimensions of one and the same condition or reality, which I choose to designate as creative intelligence.

From this point of view the antithesis is not between faith and reason but between faith (properly understood) and superstition and simultaneously between reason and superstition, for faith and reason, properly understood, always go together. Yet unfortunately, much that goes by the name of reason (uncritically equated with science) is at root superstitious; and much that goes by the name of faith (uncritically equated with dogmatic religion) is through and through superstitious. When we purify and clarify our notions, we find that these are two inseparable dimensions of intelligent life.

Faith is an attitude, an orientation, of the whole person to the Whole; an attitude and an orientation that are necessary if life is not to be a vacuous existence, if the person is not to be reduced to a moving zombie. But we are intellectual creatures, and our intellect demands that that orientation be translated into intellectual terms. And then, if we are to preserve our integrity, that intellectual translation must be probed in the fire of reason; must be consumed by that fire and then arise, phoenix-like from the ashes, in literature and art, in myths and metaphysical systems, which claim no



actuality.

Rather than debating the apparently antithetical claims of faith and reason, it would be more fruitful to consider the polarity of mysticism and reason. The polarity of mysticism and reason is a vital, dynamic unity; neither pole has its full *dunamis* in the absence of the other. When separated, reason is empty and lifeless, mysticism nebulous and out of touch with the world. In unison they produce insight and lucidity, the lucidity of a harmonious, coherent vision of reality.

The trouble with humankind is that we are not whole humans; we are fragmented, and one of the reasons for our fragmentation is that our religion is mindless and our philosophy soulless. To regain the wholeness of humanity we need to philosophize our religion and to spiritualize our philosophy.

The French *philosophes* of the eighteenth century meant to render a much-needed service to humanity when they sought to demolish all dogma and all superstition and establish in their place the reign of reason. It is a sad comment on the state of human culture and human civilization that more than two centuries after their noble efforts victory in the battle is far from being in sight. The failure is partly to be blamed on the Enlightenment thinkers themselves. In their enthusiasm they achieved an overkill. Their followers, equating reason with science, believed that a scientific attitude and a scientific orientation were all that was needed to give direction and meaning to human life. In place of the old established religions of divine revelation we were given the new established religion of scientific dictation. Kant's judicious discrimination between the realm of objective scientific knowledge and the realm of intuition into moral principles and values and metaphysical realities was too much of a weight for an age blown high by the swift wind of dazzling scientific and technological achievements.

Thus while the denudation of religious experience of its theological trappings should have left us with the kernel of pure philosophical insight, scientifically-modeled thinking in its multifarious metamorphoses – empiricism, positivism, phenomenism, behaviourism –, throwing away the baby with the bath-water, left us with an objectively given world which

cannot host value or meaning. There is no wonder then that we should end with Wittgenstein's loss of nerve; for Wittgenstein, having, in deference to his analytic mentors and in defiance to the promptings of his better self, denied himself the living waters of the inward reality, had to confess that the world as objectively given is absurd and insipid.

The German Idealists who came in the wake of Kant, trying to salvage the philosophical kernel, instead of developing the Kantian position, sneaked around it, seeking to restore to pure reason jurisdiction over the objective world. Instead of acknowledging that their majestic systems were magnificent myths giving imaginative expression to our inner reality, every one of them insisted that his system was the rationally deducible, definitive statement of ultimate truth, a final revelation of ultimate reality! Would that they had read their Plato with understanding!

So we find ourselves at this juncture once again in need of asserting that we must have and can have spirituality without dogma; we must have and can have rationality without drying up the founts of our inner reality.

## THE WITTGENSTEIN ENIGMA

In this essay I offer an unorthodox approach to Wittgenstein. The essay consists in four parts: I. The Enigma, II. The Riddle of the *Tractatus*, III. Russell and Wittgenstein, IV. Concluding Remarks.

### I. THE ENIGMA

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) is the great enigma of twentieth-century philosophy. Not only were his personality and life enigmatic, but his philosophical work is replete with riddles. And he has been misunderstood and continues to be misunderstood for the curious reason that those who pose as his followers and who monopolize the exposition and interpretation of his thought belong to the school of philosophy whose very foundations he demolished. Analytical philosophers have idolized Ludwig Wittgenstein, not realizing that he is the apostate that discovered the banality and bankruptcy of Analytical Philosophy. But they cannot understand him so long as they are in denial and refuse to see that he is not their champion but their most radical opponent.

Does it not or should it not give pause that a logical treatise, believed to be structured in correct logical form, should be open to so many conflicting

interpretations by acknowledged experts? To realize that the *Tractatus* is open to contradictory interpretations we need not go far. Wittgenstein himself said that Russell's reading of the treatise was riddled with misunderstandings. Perhaps Russell read, or wanted to read, an orthodox version of Logical Analysis into the treatise. What are we to make of Wittgenstein's remark in that case? Would it not mean that the orthodox reading misses the author's intention?

Wittgenstein opens the preface to the *Tractatus* with the words, "Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it." This emboldens me to spell out my claim that the *Tractatus* has so far remained an unsolved riddle and that I hold the key to the solution. Wittgenstein's words would be very odd were they meant to preface a logical treatise. Therefore, the *Tractatus* is not primarily a logical treatise and all who have read it and treated it as such have misunderstood it, beginning with Bertrand Russell.

But the second paragraph of the preface is deceptive and has, I believe, deceived his Logical Analysis friends — not intentionally, but because Wittgenstein failed to resolve the conflict between his allegiance to the Logical Symbolism he imbibed from Frege and Russell and his 'suppressed' mystic and metaphysical yearnings which continued to torment him like an unacknowledged illicit desire, erupting in the obscurities, inconsistencies and contradictions that baffle mainstream interpretations.

All Wittgenstein scholars have spoken of the mystic strain in the *Tractatus*. In fact, in the last few pages it is so loudly emphasized that no one could miss it. But they have treated it as an embarrassing non-integral and inexplicable adjunct to the logical substance. On the contrary, I see it as the crowning flower of the logical investigation.

The preface ends with a succinct summing up of the ostensible outcome of the *Tractatus*: it unassailably and definitively solves all the problems of philosophy only to discover that, in so doing, we end up with nothing.

I claim that my special version of Platonism can throw a ray of light that will render the riddle of the *Tractatus* intelligible. I will therefore preface this study by some remarks preparing the ground for my unorthodox approach to the problem.

I vaunt an odd affinity between Ludwig Wittgenstein and poor me. In all

my writings I have been saying what the advocates of Logical Analysis have said — but with a crucial difference. I have maintained that there is no ‘truth’ in metaphysical statements, that metaphysical statements are ‘nonsense’ as defined by the Logical Analysts, but whereas they say it is meaningless nonsense I say that it is not only meaningful but is the profoundest of meaningful speech. Metaphysical statements are oracular utterances giving mythical expression to the reality of creative intelligence, which is our proper reality and the only reality we know. The expression is mythical and therefore can always be falsified, but is meaningful as an inherently intelligible representation of our inner reality.

From Plato onwards philosophers have been like little children spinning fables and fairy tales. Their fables and fairy tales created worlds in which they lived and others could live a life more real than any life possible in the world of hard fact and verifiable truth. But like little children they did not realize, or did not always fully realize, that their fables and fairy tales were products of their own creative minds, until Locke and Hume shook their credulity and Kant groped his way back to the truth that Socrates saw so clearly but that even Plato only waveringly held to. This is the position I have been advancing in all my writings, particularly in *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, second edition 2008) and *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005).

The youthful Wittgenstein, under the tutelage of Frege and Russell, accepted the Analytical project as the climax of philosophical wisdom. (See, for instance, *Tractatus* 4.003, 4.06 and 4.112.) Yet he did not rest in the inane answer that metaphysical perplexities can be made to vanish into thin air by unravelling linguistic knots. In the deepest recesses of his mind there was a yearning, not for the truth pursued by the Positivists and the Analysts, but for the *alêtheia* wooed by Plato, that can only be expressed in myth and metaphor. He discovered the bankruptcy of Logical Analysis and, I claim, was moving towards a position similar to that I outlined in the foregoing lines, but he stopped halfway, and thereby brought about all his difficulties. Just as Hume took the Empiricist assumptions of Locke to their logical conclusion and proved the impossibility of certain (= apodeictic) knowledge, so Wittgenstein took the premises of Logical Analysis to their logical conclusions and ended up by confessing:

“My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

“He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

“What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”

(*Tractatus*, 6.54, 7, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, 1961.)

The mysticism which students of Wittgenstein commonly relegate to his later thought was rooted in the *Tractatus*. He was too intelligent and too profound to find permanent satisfaction in the thin fare afforded by the assumptions of Logical Analysis to whose seduction he had fallen in the innocence of his youthful enthusiasm for the work of Frege and Russell. When in the *Tractatus* he spoke of throwing away the ladder and when he enjoined: “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen” (“What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence”), he was already sensing the rumbling of depths that demanded an expression that cannot be spoken.

Perhaps never since Empedocles has a great thinker’s personality and thought been so enigmatic as Wittgenstein’s. Academic pundits who would unhesitatingly throw away a dissertation that dared to show any deviation from sanctioned norms and hallowed mainstream views, who disdainfully dismiss Nietzsche’s aphorisms and poetic flights, stand in awe before Wittgenstein’s obscurities and aphoristic riddles. To them he has become a sacrosanct idol. Wittgenstein must have had some magic spell that he cast over those who came his way. The advocate of Common Sense G. E. Moore could say of Wittgenstein, “He has made me think that what is required for the solution of philosophical problems which baffle me, is a method quite different from any which I have ever used — a method which he himself uses quite successfully, but which I have never been able to understand clearly enough to use it myself.”

Wittgenstein came to philosophy by a circuitous route. He studied mechanical engineering; this led him to mathematics, which in turn led him

to questions about the foundations of mathematics. These questions were regarded by the Analysts and the Logical Positivists as properly philosophical, or possibly as the whole of philosophy. Even though Wittgenstein seems to have felt throughout his life the pressure of moral and religious questionings, yet at first he seems to have accepted this view, common to Frege, Russell, and the Vienna Circle. Wittgenstein was crippled by their notion of metaphysical nonsense. Carnap could live within the confines of his theory. Frege was first and last a mathematician. Moore was content with his intuition. Russell could skip happily back and forth between two isolated worlds. Wittgenstein rebelled and sought to break through the confining fetters. He only half succeeded.

The *Tractatus* explores the possibilities of purely logical propositions, and concludes that they are all empty. This is explicitly stated in 5.43 where Wittgenstein states that “all the propositions of logic say the same thing, to wit nothing.” This is the conclusion that drove Wittgenstein to despair, but that the giants of Logical Symbolism, too fond of their nice equations and neat formal structures, refused to acknowledge.

Wittgenstein chooses for motto to the *Tractatus* the following words extracted from Kürnberger: “... and whatever a man knows, whatever is not mere rumbling and roaring that he has heard, can be said in three words.” I venture to supply the three words: ich weiss nichts! (I know nothing), which would seem consistent with Wittgenstein’s concluding words: “one must be silent”. But twenty-four centuries earlier a man with a clear head and clear vision said, “I know nothing”, yet instead of following that with the injunction, “Be silent!”, enjoined, “Know thyself!”, implying, “for in thyself is all that you know and all you need to know.”

## II. THE RIDDLE OF THE *TRACTATUS*

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is architected on a foundation of seven basic propositions. With the exception of the seventh, which consists of one short oracular sentence, each of the basic propositions is developed in multi-tiered subsidiary propositions. But the seeming perfect structuring of the *Tractatus* is deceptive. It is not possible to find in it a coherent whole,

because, I believe, Wittgenstein was working under conflicting and irreconcilable tensions. If there is a unity in the *Tractatus*, it is not a unity of structure or system; it is a unity of direction. In my comments below on various propositions, I will be tracing Wittgenstein's reluctant progress – like the man in Plato's allegory being dragged from the darkness of the cave to the vision of the sun – from the darkness of Logical Analysis to the luminosity of mystic insight. (All the quotations below are from the 1961 translation by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. All emphases shown are in the original.)

The first proposition stipulates: “The world is all that is the case.” The six short subsidiary propositions already contain much that is open to different interpretations, such as “The world is determined by the facts, and by their being all the facts” (1.11), and “The facts in logical space are the world” (1.13). But apart from the inescapable vagueness in these propositions, if “The world is all that is the case” implies ‘and nothing beside all that is the case’, then we have here the empiricist reductionist banning of the subjective and the transcendental.

Thus in the very first sentence of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein bans metaphysical philosophizing and in so doing creates for himself the dilemma that tore him apart and continued to tear him apart to the end of his life. By defining the world as “all that is the case”, he leaves the philosopher without a world. For a philosopher's proper world, a philosopher's universe of discourse, is not objective and not objectifiable. It is not a world of actualities but a world of meaning, the intelligible realm. That is what Socrates saw clearly when he renounced the investigation of things *en tois ergois* and decided instead to investigate things *en tois logois*.

So when at 4.25 Wittgenstein says, “If all true elementary propositions are given, the result is a complete description of the world”, I would add: only of the world as already defined, as the sum of all that is the case, the natural world, the world of actualities. There can be no description of reality. There can only be an expression, a projection, a representation of reality in myths that reveal reality. (Reality = transcendent reality, opposed to existence. See “On What Is Real: An Answer to Quine's ‘On What There Is’”.)

Proposition 2, “What is the case – a fact – is the existence of states of affairs”, together with its subsidiary propositions, suggests that Wittgenstein



did not intend his book as a purely logical treatise. Throughout the *Tractatus* he keeps moving from the logical to the physical, from the cosmological to the metaphysical, without ever setting clear boundaries between these spheres.

At 3 Wittgenstein stipulates: “A logical picture of facts is a thought”, which he amplifies in 3.001: “‘A state of affairs is thinkable’: what this means is that we can picture it to ourselves.” But when at 3.03 we read: “Thought can never be of anything illogical, since, if it were, we should have to think illogically”, I take this as equivalent to the old *Homo mensura* of Protagoras, “Man is the measure of all things, of those which are, that they are, and of those which are not, that they are not.” But don’t we then sacrifice the relation of thought to the outside world? Wittgenstein’s thinking on this question remains ambivalent throughout the *Tractatus*.

Proposition 3.141 reads: “A proposition is not a blend of words. — (Just as a theme in music is not a blend of notes.) A proposition is articulate.” I take this to mean that what is real in a proposition is the whole that is irreducible to its constituent elements. And I suspect that Wittgenstein half-meant that, and that when he came to acknowledge to himself what he meant he knew that Logical Analysis was not the way for him.

Proposition 3.3 states: “Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning.” This (together with 3.141) may or may not mean the same as what I have been saying again and again in my writings: no single word can by itself and in itself have a fixed meaning. With every use of the word, in every new context in which it is placed, it obtains a special, an original, meaning which is a function of the whole apart from which it has only a schematic sense but not a viable meaning. (I use ‘function’. ‘sense’, etc., naively, not in the technical sense these terms have in mathematical logic.) But if this is what Wittgenstein meant, then it runs counter to the very foundations of Logical Analysis and bares the fundamental fictitiousness of Logical Symbolism. That this was, if not in the foreground, at any rate in the background of Wittgenstein’s thought, is, to my mind, shown by the fact that in the end he draws the conclusion that “all the propositions of logic say the same thing, to wit nothing” (5.43).

Wittgenstein says, “No proposition can make a statement about itself, because a propositional sign cannot be contained in itself (that is the whole

of the ‘theory of types’)” (3.332). In commenting on the Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides* of Plato (see my *Plato: An Interpretation*, p.37f.) I believe I say much the same thing, albeit without technicality, which gives me as much right as Wittgenstein to declare, “That disposes of Russell’s paradox” (3.333).

“What can be shown, cannot be said.” (4.1212) If we had to show the complete fatuity of the project of Logical Analysis, this simple sentence would be a fit text. A sentence of exemplary simplicity and clarity — seemingly! Does it have a definite, ascertainable meaning? Anyone who knows English (or whatever natural language in which it may be phrased) would unhesitantly assert that the meaning is clear to her/him. But probe deeper and you will find that everyone has infused it with a special meaning derived from the metaphysics that underlie her/his *Weltanschauung*. The meaning I find, or put, into these words may or may not be far removed from what Wittgenstein had in mind, but I bet Frege, Russell, Carnap, would have found a very different meaning, or possibly no meaning at all, in this deceptively simple sentence.

Under 5 Wittgenstein not only makes all inference tautologous: “If p follows from q, the sense of ‘p’ is contained in the sense of ‘q’” (5.122), but also repeats the Humean negation of the possibility of certainty in natural science: “There is no possible way of making an inference from the existence of one situation to the existence of another, entirely different situation” (5.135), and again more explicitly: “We cannot infer the events of the future from those of the present. Superstition is nothing but belief in the causal nexus.” (5.1361)

(At 5.1362– Wittgenstein summarily dismisses the problem of the freedom of the will by making one particular enunciation of the problem senseless, but I do not intend to expand on this here.)

“If the truth of a proposition does not follow from the fact that it is self-evident to us, then its self-evidence in no way justifies our belief in its truth” (5.1363): unless this is taken to be a tortuous way of saying simply that self-evidence is all we need, then it, to my mind, creates a paradox more vacuous than Russell’s Paradox. What sense is there in separating the truth of a proposition from the self-evidence of a proposition? To require proof of the self-evident is to create the Third Man and Russell’s Paradox all over again.

Perhaps that is what Wittgenstein wanted to say, but then the proposition would be badly worded.

When we say, “All truth-functions are results of successive applications to elementary propositions of a finite number of truth-operations” (5.32), we are in danger of taking this to mean that understanding (the word ‘truth’ is a snare I try to be wary of) in philosophical and in practical matters can be attained by reducing problems to, and deriving conclusions from, simple, elementary propositions. This is the Analytic illusion. It blinds us to the fact that logic and analysis can never be a substitute for creative thinking. It is really inconsistent with the holistic insight that finds expression elsewhere in the *Tractatus*.

No one needs to study logic to think clearly and consistently. Intelligibility is an aesthetic property. Any normal person can immediately appreciate the validity of coherent thinking. That is the whole point of the mathematical experiment with the slave boy in Plato’s *Meno*. When our politicians trade their deceptions and when we all go our several foolish ways, it is not want of logic but the force of unquestioned prejudices and passively received false value judgements that cause us to err. I see 5.4731 as supportive of this view.

I will not comment at length here on 5.5421 where Wittgenstein affirms that “there is no such thing as the soul”, and again that “a composite soul would no longer be a soul.” I will only say that there is more than one sense in which what Wittgenstein says is acceptable, but this acceptable sense can easily be turned into gross error. This is also the case with 5.631 on “the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.”

Wittgenstein says, “Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt” (“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world”) (5.6). This is only true if ‘meine Welt’ is equated with the objective, the given, world solely. But underneath the objective world and beyond the reach of articulate speech there is the ineffable immediacy of my inner reality. Wittgenstein continues, “Die Logik erfüllt die Welt; die Grenzen der Welt sind auch ihre Grenzen” (“Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits” (5.61). Again this is true but only qualifiedly; or maybe it’s truer than Wittgenstein intended. Logic pervades the existent, the objective world, and the boundaries of that world are indeed the boundaries

and confines of logic: the world comprehends logic, but logic does not comprehend Reality.

When Wittgenstein says, “The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.” (5.632), I see him straining to break the fetters of Logical Analysis and reach beyond. He develops this, albeit cryptically, in 5.633. Like Jacob wrestling with God, Wittgenstein is here wrestling with the Reality that logic cannot comprehend. This is what the Logical Analysts forbade him as Jehovah forbade Adam the fruit of Knowledge. But, like the wise serpent and like daring Eve, he demanded the right to taste of the forbidden fruit. This is perhaps more evident in 5.641 where Wittgenstein speaks of the metaphysical subject.

The enigma, or rather the tragedy, of Wittgenstein is that he broke down the bars of the cage in which the Logical Analysts incarcerated him, but was too timid to step beyond the ground of the cage. The enclosing bars were gone and the endless horizon captivated his vision, but he remained put. It is such a pity that Wittgenstein’s mentors taught him that all early philosophy is worthless. Had he read Plato with open eyes he would have found in him the insight he craved and the liberation he yearned for.

When Wittgenstein at 5.122 said, “If  $p$  follows from  $q$ , the sense of ‘ $p$ ’ is contained in the sense of ‘ $q$ ’”, this had inevitably to lead to 6.002 and further to 6.1, “The propositions of logic are tautologies”, and 6.11, “Therefore the propositions of logic say nothing. (They are the analytic propositions.)” All of this simply amplifies on “all the propositions of logic say the same thing, to wit nothing” (5.43).

“The concept of number is simply what is common to all numbers, the general form of a number.” (6.022) Whatever be the utility of this for mathematical logic, Wittgenstein was later to say that there is nothing common to a multiplicity of instances (*Philosophical Investigations*, I. 65). This is philosophically more significant. It is what Socrates showed again and again in his dialectic, but which nobody seems to have grasped: that the idea of a common character is a chimera; definition, except as an *ad hoc* tool for a specific purpose, is a Holy Grail; an idea is not an Aristotelean abstraction, but a creative pattern, a form, conferring intelligibility and meaning on nebulous givennesses. (See my *Plato: An Interpretation*, ch.3, “The Socratic Elenchus”.)

I would say that Wittgenstein was groping towards the Socratic insight that all understanding is grounded in the self-evidence of inborn ideas. In the end, we know nothing but Socrates' foolish "It is by Beauty that all things beautiful are beautiful". That is understanding and there is no understanding other than that. All the descriptions, all the factual reports, of natural science, all the equations of mathematics, give us usable information, but not understanding. That is the insight revealed in Socrates' declaration that he does not seek *aitiai* in nature but in ideas; ideas are for him the only and the sufficient *aitiai*: not *en tois ergois* but *en tois logois* he seeks and finds understanding.

Proposition 6.3 asserts: "The exploration of logic means the exploration of everything that is subject to law. And outside logic everything is accidental." That is the bold assumption that is the foundation of Logical Analysis. It falsely excludes the possibility of metaphysics. Outside logic everything is NOT accidental. Outside logic is the intelligibility, the rational sufficiency, of creative affirmation. That a wholesome soul is the proper excellence of a human being (the one *credo* Socrates lived by, lived for, and died for) does not follow logically from any premise, but it generates logically all the judgements that give meaning and value to human life.

Proposition 6.371, "The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena", should be taken together with 6.341, 6.342, and 6.372. Here we have a conception of natural science and scientific knowledge that neither scientists nor professional philosophers have yet absorbed, but it would take us beyond our present task to expand on this.

The obscurity of 6.41 requires an articulate metaphysical background to illumine it. "The sense of the world must lie outside the world. ... in it no value exists ... If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. ..." Here we see Wittgenstein reaching out for the transcendent Reality that Logical Analysts deny.

Yet Wittgenstein is unable to break through his Analytical presuppositions. "So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher" (6.42). This is the prison in which Carnap and Frege and Russell imprisoned Wittgenstein and

from which he refused to break free even when he had demolished its walls. Once the postulate “In a proposition a thought finds an expression that can be perceived by the senses” (3.1) is accepted, once it is accepted that propositions relate to nothing but what is the case, then of course “it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics.” Ethical statements have no factual content, do not relate to existents; they relate to realities that do not ‘exist’ but have their being in the intelligible realm that is bred in and by the mind. Had Wittgenstein studied Plato, he would have found the answer to his puzzlement. (See my “The Rationality of Socrates’ Moral Philosophy”, incorporated in *Plato: An Interpretation* as chapter 2.)

When I see the perplexity in 6.4312 (on immortality) I cannot help exclaiming, What a pity it is that Wittgenstein’s mentors deprived him of the possibility of treating metaphysical questions metaphysically. The Analysts may applaud this and similar propositions in the *Tractatus*, thinking these bare the nonsensicality of such questions. They do not see that Wittgenstein here is struggling against the sterility of the meaningless and valueless world of facts to which Logical Analysis restricted him.

“How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world.” (6.432) Let me dress this in different garb. The natural world does not disclose ultimate reality. Ultimate reality is a creation of the mind, a fiction if you will, but a fiction that gives our life meaning and value. We created God, but God is not therefore an illusion; God is the reality we live when we live a properly human life on the spiritual plane.

“It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.” (6.44) Here again I will permit myself to give my own version of this. The ultimate mystery of being is the ultimate irrationality of reality. *Pace* Parmenides and Hegel, ultimately reality is not rational but beyond reason, as Plato, of all philosophers, clearly saw. (*Republic*, 508e-509a.) Only the great mystics shared this insight with Plato. That my interpretation does not radically falsify Wittgenstein’s position can be seen from 6.45 where he says, “To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole — a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole — it is this that is mystical.” This is Parmenides and Spinoza in one.

Shocked at his heretical blasphemy against the religion of Logical

Analysis, Wittgenstein utters a formal recantation of his heretical mysticism in 6.5 — but it is more of a recantation after the manner of Galileo's "*E pur si muove*".

In 6.52 and 6.521 Wittgenstein is vainly trying to escape committing himself to mysticism or to metaphysics by resorting to the vanishing trick. What cannot be given a logical answer cannot even be asked logically. Therefore there is no problem. But the problem does not recognize the authority of his logic and obstinately goes on nagging in his mind. So when we read, "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical" (6.522), we realize that Wittgenstein could never shed his mysticism.

The wavering is clearly evident in 6.53. Here Wittgenstein was clearly fooling himself or fooling his mentors. He was repeating by rote what they had taught him. But had he been convinced by this, satisfied with this, he would not have been so much subject to the seduction of the mystic lure. Analytical philosophers see this proposition as the statement of his final position and conveniently brush his mystic mumblings under the carpet.

Proposition 6.54, which has been quoted and commented on by every commentator on Wittgenstein, has not, to my mind, been so much as half understood. The first paragraph of this proposition is the epitome of the whole *Tractatus* and to comment on it would be to repeat all that I have been saying above. But in the one-sentence second paragraph: "He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright", I detect a cryptic message. While Analytical philosophers might take the words "then he will see the world aright" as meaning: then he will see the world 'scientifically', 'logically', I connect these words with 6.522 "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical", and take them to mean that only in the mystical vision do we "see the world aright". This is the profound meaning that Bertrand Russell in his logical reduction of Wittgenstein's mysticism squanders, and in the wake of Russell all Analytical philosophers.

Wittgenstein concludes with the agonized cry, "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen", ("What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence") (7). The whole of my essay is my

comment on this one sentence.

### III. RUSSELL AND WITTGENSTEIN

To show how Analytical philosophers have failed to understand Wittgenstein I will concentrate on one thinker — one who was best placed to know Wittgenstein's thought, Bertrand Russell.

Russell's first impression of the young Wittgenstein was summed up in the words: "obstinate and perverse, but I think not stupid". Not much later on he was saying, "Perhaps he will do great things. I love him and feel he will solve the problems I am too old to solve." (In fact Russell survived Wittgenstein by almost two decades.) That was too fond a dream for Russell to give up easily.

Between 1911 and 1913 Wittgenstein engaged in conversations with Russell on the foundations of logic. Between 1914-1916, during the years of WWI, he completed drafting the *Tractatus*. Then, "very soon after the Armistice, while he was still a prisoner at Monte Cassino", Wittgenstein sent Russell the typescript, as Russell wrote in *My Philosophical Development* (1959).

By the time he wrote the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had already discovered the vacuity of Analytical philosophy. But Russell was so eager to see in young Ludwig the disciple that would carry on the master's work that he was blinded to the radical discrepancy between his approach and Wittgenstein's. The disciple was already an apostate when Russell was penning the laudatory introduction to the thin volume that was seen as the Gospel of the new philosophy. Nobody seems to have realized that the Gospel was blasphemous. The explosive oppositions between Wittgenstein's preface and Russell's introduction to the *Tractatus* could only be hidden by an overriding mental prejudice. They were not so hidden to Wittgenstein.

In 1959, thirty-seven years after Bertrand Russell had written his introduction to the *Tractatus* and when Wittgenstein had been eight years dead, Russell included in his *My Philosophical Development* a chapter entitled "The Impact of Wittgenstein" and also discussed his relations with



Wittgenstein elsewhere in the book, particularly in the final chapter, “Some Replies to Criticism”.

Russell says, “Wittgenstein’s doctrines influenced me profoundly. I have come to think that on many points I went too far in agreeing with him ...” (p.83). From first to last Russell saw nothing in the *Tractatus* and understood nothing of it beyond its contributions to the theory of mathematical logic.

We see this unmistakably when Russell continues, “Wittgenstein’s impact upon me came in two waves: the first of these was before the First World War; the second was immediately after the War when he sent me his manuscript of the *Tractatus*. His later doctrines, as they appear in his *Philosophical Investigations*, have not influenced me at all” (p.83).

Russell goes on to say, “I do not feel sure that, either then [before WWI] or later, the views which I believed myself to have derived from him were in fact his views. He always vehemently repudiated expositions of his doctrines by others, even when those others were ardent disciples” (pp.83-84). I think this is only understandable if the doctrines concerned related to the extra-logical aspects of Wittgenstein’s thought. Part of Wittgenstein’s tragedy was that he felt he was misunderstood — he was a voice crying in the wilderness.

Earlier, in the opening sentence of his introduction to the youthful work, Russell had affirmed that the *Tractatus* “certainly deserves, by its breadth and scope and profundity, to be considered an important event in the philosophical world.” This testimony is preceded by the words, “whether or not it prove to give the ultimate truth on the matters with which it deals”, which implies that Russell, when he wrote this, believed that ‘the ultimate truth’ on such matters is within our reach. Thus the first sentence contradicts Wittgenstein’s conclusion, that all logic is tautological and outside logic there is nothing we can put in words.

Russell continues, “Starting from the principles of Symbolism and the relations which are necessary between words and things in any language, it applies the result of this inquiry to various departments of traditional philosophy, showing in each case how traditional philosophy and traditional solutions arise out of ignorance of the principles of Symbolism and out of misuse of language.” Clearly, Russell chose to read the *Tractatus* as an initial, excusably faltering exercise by the bright pupil who will carry on the

work of the master. He did not see that the *Tractatus* was the outburst of a deep spiritual crisis, the shriek of a soul that felt suffocated in the vacuum of Logical Symbolism, desperately yearning for a Reality beyond the reach of mathematical logic.

Next Russell writes, “The logical structure of propositions and the nature of logical inference are first dealt with. Thence we pass successively to Theory of Knowledge, Principles of Physics, Ethics, and finally the Mystical (das Mystische)” (pp.ix-x). This is part of the misunderstanding of the purpose of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein brings in Physics, Ethics, and the Mystical, not to deal with their principles but only to say that these fall outside the jurisdiction of logic. (See for example the brilliant 6.341 baring the *ad hoc* character of Newtonian mechanics.) One feels that Russell, in surveying the contents of the *Tractatus*, is setting out problems he is concerned with, not the problems that Wittgenstein is addressing.

Russell then writes, “That which has to be in common between the sentence and the fact cannot, so he contends, be itself in turn said in language. It can, in his phraseology, only be shown, not said, for whatever we may say will still need to have the same structure” (p.x). In saying this, I believe, Russell misses completely the point of Wittgenstein’s comment on Russell’s theory of Types. Analytical philosophers have to this day failed to grasp the point of Wittgenstein’s assessment. (See *Tractatus* 3.331, 3.332, 3.333.)

Russell also completely misses the profounder meaning of 6.41. His discussion (or exposition) of Wittgenstein’s “limitation of logic to things within the world as opposed to the world as a whole” and of Wittgenstein’s “somewhat curious discussion of Solipsism” (pp.xvi-xviii) reduces Wittgenstein’s insights to a logical formality. Again, Russell’s treatment of Wittgenstein’s “attitude towards the mystical” (pp.xx-xxi) clearly shows Russell’s congenital incapacity for the metaphysical.

The penultimate paragraph of the introduction (concerning ‘the problem of generality’) not only shows Russell’s failure to understand Wittgenstein’s criticism of the theory of Types, but the final sentence of this paragraph reveals a gross error in understanding Wittgenstein’s “So one cannot say, for example, ‘There are objects, as one might say, ‘There are books’”, which Russell curiously confounds with the problem of ‘totality’ (4.1272). The

impassable gap between the two approaches comes out clearly in Russell's later discussion of the problem and is congealed in a curious incident which Russell relates in *My Philosophical Development*, which deserves close attention:

“There is another point of very considerable importance, and that is that Wittgenstein will not permit any statement about all the things in the world. [Russell at this point explains the *Principia Mathematica* definition of totality.] Wittgenstein ... says that such a proposition as ‘there are more than three things in the world’ is meaningless. When I was discussing the *Tractatus* with him at The Hague in 1919, I had before me a sheet of white paper and I made on it three blobs of ink. I besought him to admit that, since there were these three blobs, there must be at least three things in the world; but he refused, resolutely. He would admit that there were three blobs on the page, because that was a finite assertion, but he would not admit that anything at all could be said about the world as a whole. This was connected with his mysticism, but was justified by his refusal to admit identity.” (p.86.)

That two of the most brilliant intellects of the twentieth century should fail to come to an understanding on such a point must surely give us pause. It brings into question the whole nature of philosophical thinking and of thinking in general. It also makes it seem arrogant for anyone to try to resolve the dispute. But try we must. I will approach the problem from two different angles.

a) Wittgenstein will readily admit that there are three blobs on the page. This is a statement that relates to particular existents in a particular region of space-time. It relates to the given world. Now, the given, the empirical, is for Russell all that there is and all that we can think of; for Wittgenstein it is all we can speak of. When Russell says, ‘there must be at least three things in the world’, he is thinking of the sum of actual things in the actual world, which is all there is for him, but for Wittgenstein this statement relates to the Whole, not the sum of actual existents but the transcendent One. To borrow theological language, this statement relates to the world as it might be for

God.

b) We can speak of three things existing for us. But there is no Three in the world. Three is an idea, a creation of the mind, that gives intelligibility to some part of our experience. Not only we cannot say that Three exists in the world but also it is only for practical purposes that we can speak of numbered things in the world; philosophically, this is not admissible. Any three things are only three for a mind that thinks conceptually; not in themselves; not in the world or for world. Kant would accept this.

The final paragraph of the introduction compounds a new version of the theory of Types, a hierarchy of successive higher languages *ad infinitum*, with a 'logical' sophism abolishing "the supposed sphere of the mystical". Russell refuses to see that there is no escape "from Mr Wittgenstein's conclusions". In *My Philosophical Development* (p. 85) he again refers to this 'solution' that he believes "disposes of Wittgenstein's mysticism". Russell errs on two counts. First, his 'solution' simply recreates his famous Paradox and its lame formal solution in the theory of Types. Secondly, his 'solution' obliterates the profound metaphysical insight in Wittgenstein's mysticism, reducing it to a logical technicality. No wonder Wittgenstein was unhappy with Russell's introduction, complaining that it was riddled with misunderstandings.

The concept of logical atomism, crucial for Analytical philosophy, was introduced by Wittgenstein in his doctrine of atomic facts and was immediately adopted by Russell, but it was already implicit in the Analytical approach and in the doctrines of Frege and of the *Principia Mathematica*, and in truth goes back to Leibniz' monadism and his dream of a perfect language.

In *My Philosophical Development* Russell refers to the principle of atomicity, quoting *Tractatus* 2.0201, then continues:

"This principle may be taken as embodying the belief in analysis. At the time when Wittgenstein wrote the *Tractatus* he believed (what, I understand, he came later to disbelieve) that the world consists of a number of simples with various properties and relations. The simple properties and simple relations of simples are 'atomic facts' and the

assertions of them are ‘atomic propositions’. The gist of the principle is that, if you knew all atomic facts and also knew that they were all, you would be in a position to infer all other true propositions by logic alone” (p.88).

Russell then branches into discussing “important difficulties that arise in connection with this principle”. What concerns me here is that in the lines I have quoted Russell acknowledges that Wittgenstein came to discard the whole rationale of Logical Analysis. I would only add that this rejection was already inherent in the *Tractatus*. In Russell’s own words, “Wittgenstein announces aphorisms and leaves the reader to estimate their profundity as best he may. Some of his aphorisms, taken literally, are scarcely compatible with the existence of symbolic logic” (p.93).

This comes out more clearly in Chapter 14, “Universals and Particulars and Names”, where Russell says, “At one time, Wittgenstein agreed with me in thinking that a logical language would be useful in philosophy, and I attributed this view to him in the introduction which I wrote to his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Unfortunately, by this time, he had not only abandoned the view, but had apparently forgotten that he ever held it. What I said about it therefore appeared to him as a misrepresentation” (p.123). Russell here puts his finger on the root of the discord between him and Wittgenstein: two opposed conceptions of philosophy. I think Russell is justified in saying that Wittgenstein at one time had agreed with him, for that was what he had been taught by Frege and Russell himself. But by the time he had completed the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had discovered that a logical language can tell us nothing of substance, that “all the propositions of logic say the same thing, to wit nothing.” Wittgenstein was justified in saying that Russell failed to see this and consequently misrepresented his position in the introduction to the *Tractatus*.

Russell remarks that Wittgenstein made the doctrine of structure “the basis of a curious kind of logical mysticism” (pp.84-85). From the explication he appends, it is clear that Russell saw nothing of Wittgenstein’s mysticism beyond the inexpressibility of the logical form. To my mind, for Wittgenstein this logical mystery was an analogy for a profounder

metaphysical mystery, the mystery of transcendent reality. I may be mistaken. I may be reading my own metaphysics into Wittgenstein's words, for Wittgenstein's text is obscure. But if Wittgenstein meant no more than Russell saw in his words, then how explain the spiritual agony manifest in Wittgenstein's life?

I will not comment on Russell's quarrel with Wittgenstein over the concept of identity and other points of dispute. To do so would involve discussing the nature of logical theory and of theoretical thinking in general. I may some day take this up in a special paper on Russell.

Russell grew increasingly impatient and embittered towards Wittgenstein. "He, himself, as usual, is oracular and emits his opinion as if it were a Czar's ukase, but humbler folk can hardly content themselves with this procedure" (p.88). This is particularly evident in the prefatory passage to Chapter 18 "Some Replies to Criticism", where he lumps him with two men Russell clearly despises: Pascal who "abandoned mathematics for piety" and Tolstoy who "debased himself before the peasants". (Personally, I share Russell's antipathy to Pascal but not to Tolstoy.)

Wittgenstein minus his mysticism would be worth no more than the summary treatment accorded him in Russell's chapter. It is his dark aphorisms, which "taken literally, are scarcely compatible with the existence of symbolic logic", that open up vistas of metaphysical vision beyond the ken of Logical Analysts.

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. Wittgenstein had discovered the barrenness of Logical Analysis and of the tools of Logical Symbolism. When he turned to the analysis of ordinary language, he was turning away from the dearth of logical and semantic abstractions, away from the false dream of Leibniz nursed by Frege and Russell, to the richness inherent in the inescapable imprecision, vagueness, and ambiguity of the language of life.
2. After a period of complete despair of all philosophizing, he sought to find meaning in life and the language of life. Did he think that in this

- way he would be solving or resolving metaphysical problems, or was he turning away altogether from metaphysical problems?
3. It may be that Wittgenstein, instead of harking to the inner voice that, like Socrates' dream, bade him 'make music', thought that he could find rest from its nagging by convincing himself that the voice was nothing but the reverberation of clumsily structured linguistic formulations. Take the parts of the formulation apart, 'elucidate' the meaning, and the nagging voice is silenced. Wittgenstein, it seems was too much a child of his age to obey the voice within. But he was deluded. He could not possibly find peace that way and remained divided. His investigations into language were doubtless of great value in many fields, not least in the study of human nature, but they did not offer a way out of metaphysical puzzlement.
  4. Even though Wittgenstein ceased to be an Analytical philosopher in the manner of Carnap, Moore, or Russell, yet it seems he was not able to escape finally from the presumption of Analytical Philosophy that it is through the analysis of statements or words that we attain truth.
  5. In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein, it seems, discovered the necessary, essential, and fecund vagueness of language (or, as I prefer to say, the fluidity of language). Language performs its vital function – its life-maintaining, life-supporting, life-advancing function – through its vagueness. When language loses its vagueness (albeit only relatively) as in the language of mathematics or chemical formulae, it is no longer a channel in which, through which, life flows, but is an insubstantial schema into which meaningful content must be infused from outside if it is to relate to life.
  6. Anyway it seems that Wittgenstein sought to replace the poverty of the world of Logical Analysis and Logical Symbolism with the ideal world embodied in living language with its blurred boundaries ("mit verschwommenen Rändern"), shadowy nooks, confused overlappings and interminglings in which we live and move and have our being, in which alone we have our properly human life.
  7. How could our present-day Sophists, our professional philosophers, understand the real point of Wittgenstein's *aporia* when they have never been able to understand that of the Socratic elenchus? In the

dialogues of Plato, Socrates again and again demonstrates the impossibility of definition, and our philosophers continue somnambulant to rehearse the error initiated by Aristotle affirming that Socrates aimed at reaching definitions. Yet Wittgenstein was not Socrates. Socrates knew what he was doing, he led his interlocutors on the hopeless venture of trying to catch the elusive definition – 'Tis here! 'Tis here! 'Tis gone! – to guide them to the pregnant *aporia* that makes them look for meaning and reality nowhere but within the mind. Socrates saw this puzzlement and the consequent confession of ignorance as a blessing. Wittgenstein too realized the impossibility of definition, but did so in desperation. He knew that in our desperate quest for definition, instead of arriving at '*das Gemeinsam*' (what is common) we only discover '*eine Verwandtschaft*' (an affinity); he knew that in language "*es fliessen ja alle Farben durcheinander*" ("all colours flow through one another"): "*Und in dieser Lage befindet sich z.B. der, der in der Aesthetik, oder Ethik nach Definitionen sucht, die unseren Begriffen entsprechen.*" (One who, in aesthetics or ethics for example, seeks definitions tallying with our concepts, finds oneself in this situation.") But instead of seeing, like Socrates, in this seemingly fruitless quest an affirmation of our inner reality, Wittgenstein merely affirms, "*Frage dich in dieser Schwierigkeit immer: Wie haben wir denn die Bedeutung dieses Wortes ('gut' z.B.) gelernt? An was für Beispielen; in welchen Sprachspielen? Du wirst dann leichter sehen, dass das Wort eine Familie von Bedeutungen haben muss.*" ("In this quandary always ask yourself: How then have we learnt the meaning of this word ('good' for example)? Out of what examples? In what language games? You will then see more easily that the word must have a family of meanings.") (*Philosophical Investigations*, I. 77.) And the sum of his Herculean labours is encapsulated in the tame declaration: "The meaning is the use."

8. Wittgenstein is reported to have said that the point of the *Tractatus* was ethical. — What did he mean by this? Did he mean that the importance of the *Tractatus* lay in showing that philosophy, as conceived by Frege and Russell, has nothing of importance or of relevance for human life? Was the 'ethical' message of the *Tractatus*



that about mathematics, and only about mathematics, may we speak, but about all else we must be silent? If so we may conceive Wittgenstein as straining, throughout many years, under this, to him, necessary but unbearable conclusion, until he thought he found there was a way to speak the unspeakable. — No. Wittgenstein never found Plato's answer to the riddle of speaking the unspeakable. Wittgenstein's turning to the investigation of life and language was not a triumphant flight but a *pis aller*.

9. If metaphysics and morals are nonsense and mathematics without content, how are we to deal rationally with the problems of life? Wittgenstein struggles with this problem until he finds the answer in the philosophy of language — which, as I say, catches only half of the Socratic solution.
10. A word has a social function and a private function, or a social dimension and a private dimension. If a word did not mean roughly the same thing to all people in a certain community there would be no communication. But a word always has different associations, different nuances, for every person.
11. The title *Philosophical Investigations* is significant. Wittgenstein after having at one time rashly believed that he had put an end to all philosophizing, later on came to see that there was room for philosophical investigation.
12. Wittgenstein came to a view of philosophy as therapy and his own work in *Philosophical Investigations* has been described as a kind of philosophical therapy. Socrates practised the same 'therapy' in his dialectical discourse, but Socrates, instead of simply clarifying the use of a term, led his interlocutors to realize (if they were alert enough) that it is only in the self-evidence of ideas in their own minds that they can find the meaning of anything, thus emphasizing that our active intelligence is our sole reality and our whole worth.
13. Having discovered the essential barrenness of Logical Analysis, Wittgenstein realized that to arrive at any meaning, to escape the deadly speechlessness of Logical Analysis and Symbolism, to say anything relating to life and the problems of living, we must have recourse to the shadowy, imprecise, fluid language of life. There, as

- Socrates knew long ago, we cannot reach ‘truth’ and cannot obtain knowledge but will find meaningfulness and have understanding. Hence while the *Tractatus* soon exhausts its message and ends by confessing its own nonsensicality, the *Investigations* propagate, and will keep propagating, endless fruitful problems and perspectives.
14. Wittgenstein’s ‘meaning as use’ is not a theory but an approach, a programme of investigation. He says that in many, though not in all, cases, where we employ the word ‘meaning’ we can define it by saying that the meaning of a word is simply its use in the language (I. 43). Having relegated all metaphysical inquiry – all examination of ultimate meaning and ultimate principles – to the realm of the unspeakable – he recommends a behaviouristic approach to the socially vital problem of clarifying linguistic transaction and communication. This is as sensible as it is modest. It is the time-honoured approach of the lexicographer.
  15. Consistently with this, Wittgenstein’s injunction, “Don’t think, but look!”, as his guiding principle in the investigation of meaning, can be rendered, “Don’t theorize, but observe and note.” This echoes “What can be shown, cannot be said” (*Tractatus*, 4.1212).
  16. Wittgenstein concludes that we cannot find what is common to all language games or all language and makes them into language or parts of language (I. 65). This is just what Socrates has shown in his elenctic discourses. In vain do we seek to capture the essence, the common character, of a number of instances, in a fixed formula. All language is language not because languages share a common character but because we have created the notion ‘language’ to assemble these numerous instances in an intelligible whole. Socrates would have us say: It is by Language that all language is language.
  17. A philosopher’s function is to create notions that extend our universe of discourse or give us new universes of discourse in which our intelligence may roam and live. Wittgenstein’s own notions of ‘language game’, ‘family resemblances’, etc., are such creative notions.
  18. Wittgenstein notes that in tracking the family resemblances of a word we “see a complicated network of resemblances, overlapping and

traversing one another” (I. 66). But it is not the difficulty of finding a common character that rules out a finally valid formal definition. No doubt for practical purposes we can always find good formal definitions — good for a specific purpose. But a formal definition does not reveal meaning. It is only the foolish Socratic beholding of an idea in the mind that reveals meaning.

## SUBJECTIVISM AND SOLIPSISM

[Appeared first in *Philosophy Pathways*,  
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/~ptpdlp/newsletter/> ]

Greek thinkers in the classical period, though they set no bounds to the daring of their thought, and though their wild speculations could easily lead to thoroughgoing scepticism, were yet too healthy-minded to ponder seriously either the problem of the existence of the ‘outside’ world or its specialized version, the reality of other persons. It was Descartes, the ‘father of modern philosophy’, who nicely chopped the whole human person into a knowing subject and a known object, that sired the rogue twins.

Doubt for Descartes was a methodological stance, but the thought that all of the world around us could conceivably be a delusion or a dream, which Descartes introduced simply as a thought experiment, nestled in the modern mind, so that there is hardly any major philosopher during the past four centuries who has not had to grapple with it.

How can we be assured of the existence of a world outside ourselves? All our knowledge of the external world reaches us through our senses. But are we justified in saying even that much? If we know nothing but what is given immediately in our experience, how can we speak of an ‘external world’ or say that the impressions ‘reach us through’ our senses?

Having recourse to the objective sciences only makes things worse. The impressions – sights, sounds, etc. – that in our naivety we take to be immediate registers of things turn out to be the outcome of long processes and the end-products seem to be far removed from the things we took them to stand for. I only mention this because it is often thought that such

scientific analyses are relevant to the problem. Yet I think it is necessary to distinguish clearly between the scientific treatment of the phenomena of vision, hearing, etc., on the one hand, and the philosophical problem of what we mean or should mean when we speak of an objective world.

Philosophically, the meaningful distinction we can make is between the subjective aspect of experience and the objective aspect. This is the only 'inside' and 'outside' that has meaning philosophically. In what sense can we say that the image or the sound is in the brain? Inside the brain there are chemical and physical happenings, but the image and the sound are part of a continuum, in which my brain, like the rest of my body, is part of the objective world and is, subjectively, 'not-I'.

I am concerned to affirm that laying emphasis on the subjectivity of knowledge need not support the runaway subjectivism that breeds solipsism. *Cogito ergo sum* only festers with error when the cognizant is severed from the lifeblood of the total cognition and turned into a lifeless abstraction. Allow me to reproduce here a passage from my *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008):

I am listening to Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* coming to me over the radio.

Where should this music be? i' th' air or the earth?  
(*The Tempest*, I.ii.)

The electronic engineer will tell me of electromagnetic radiation, modulation processes and resonant circuits. The physicist will tell me of wave motion, vibrations of molecules, and fronts of compression and rarefaction. The physiologist will tell me of tympanic membranes, ossicles and cochlear nerves. The biochemist will tell me of the electrical activity of the brain and of nerve impulses transmitted electromechanically. All of these are abstractions that kill the music. The women contending for the new-born babe before Solomon are not

two but legion, and the baby is not rent in twain but fragmented into a myriad shreds.

Where should this music be? i' th' air or the earth?

The music is an aspect of a continuum in which my being extends – quite strictly speaking and without metaphor – to comprehend the whole system. Any fragmentation, any separation of a member of the system, lands us into contradictions and absurdities. The baby must remain whole to remain alive. I believe that is what Whitehead meant in asserting that the (secondary) qualities are in the real world.

Now let us turn to what I referred to as the specialized problem of solipsism. The French physician Claude Brunet, in the seventeenth century, starting from Descartes's *Cogito*, which bases all certainty in knowledge on personal intuition, gave for the first time in modern times a clear-cut exposition of solipsism (Latin *solus ipse* = myself alone). Thus solipsism can be seen as a consequence of subjective idealism. Descartes himself evaded the consequences of his position by saying that God is no deceiver, and since he made us to believe in the existence of corporeal things, we must admit that corporeal things exist. (*Meditations*, Sixth Meditation.) Berkeley, on the other hand, for whom things are only ideas, escaped solipsism because for him those ideas subsist not in the mind of the individual perceiver but in the mind of God.

Subjectivism as the claim that knowledge is restricted to one's own perceptions is in one sense incontestable. Knowledge as knowledge is a subjective affair. But two further contentions that may be thought to follow from this are, in my view, unjustified: (1) that we have no knowledge of an 'external' or 'objective' world; (2) that all knowledge is reducible to what is given in perception. We may note in passing that though these two contentions arise from one and the same initial observation, they tend to lead to two diametrically opposed theoretical positions, denial of an 'external' or

‘objective’ world leading to subjective idealism, while the affirmation of the reducibility of knowledge to sense experience leads to a radical empiricism which presumes to do away with the subject and subjectivity altogether.

In an important article on “Subjectivism and the Problem of Other Minds” ( <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/s/solipsis.htm> ) in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Professor Stephen Thornton, briefly examines various answers to the problem but dwells in some detail on the answer(s) that can be drawn from Wittgenstein’s late works, mainly *Philosophical Investigations* and *The Blue Book* and *Brown Books*. I will here offer some comments on certain points in Professor Thornton’s article followed by an examination in which I beg leave once more to draw extensively on my *Let Us Philosophize* (LUP).

Having reviewed the ‘argument from analogy’ (advanced by Bertrand Russell and A.J. Ayer among others), Professor Thornton subjects the argument to criticism which, if valid, “demonstrates that the acceptance of the Cartesian account of consciousness ... leads inexorably to solipsism.” Further the argument he has advanced “can, and should be understood as a *reductio ad absurdum* refutation of these Cartesian principles.” Thornton sums up his argument as follows:

The *reductio* as here presented is a plausible *ad hominem*. The notion of ‘an inanimate object being conscious’ is self-contradictory only if we start by admitting the concept of ‘an inanimate object’. But are we obliged to do so? This concept is an abstraction, a useful working abstraction; beyond that it is a fiction. To see that no necessity attaches to it, it is enough to consider possible alternatives such as animism (naïve or sophisticated), pantheism (Spinoza’s, for instance), or Berkeley’s God-grounded phenomenalism, none of which is intrinsically absurd.

Professor Thornton cites Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*:

Only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious. (I. § 281).

I do not find Wittgenstein's statement convincing. It is only descriptive of a limitation in our imaginative powers. I don't think that our conceptual powers are limited in the same way. I cannot conceive of a part being greater than the whole of which it is a part, but – however difficult it may be to imagine – I can conceive of the sands of the sea-shore being glad to receive the rays of the rising sun. There is no irrationality here as in the case of the part and the whole.

Again, Professor Thornton adduces in his rejection of the coherence of solipsism Wittgenstein's argument from language: solipsism is incompatible with the existence of a language, of which the solipsist must avail himself to express his view. I do not think this argument is conclusive. The solipsist may admit that s/he is inconsistent in using language but go on to say, "What of that? I am inconsistent because I allow myself to succumb to the delusion of there being other beings. If I could resist the seduction of that delusion, I would use no language at all."

Let us take the statement, "I know that I am in pain", which Wittgenstein considers nonsensical because "it cannot be meaningfully asserted of me that I know that I am in pain." I would say that the statement, like every determinately articulated statement, can indeed be shown to be contradictory. The contradiction stems from the necessity inherent in all thought and in all language of fragmenting what is whole. To say that I know that I am in pain is therefore necessarily contradictory but is not meaningless. It is meaningful since I know what it means when I say it. (I could put this naïve assertion in various sophisticated alternative formulations, but I don't think we would gain anything by that since all linguistic formulations can be shown to be contradictory.) Wittgenstein reduces meaning to linguistic functionality. This is the meaning of his famous "The meaning is the use". This is a legitimate methodological proceeding. But then to go on to assume that that is all there is to meaning,



amounts to negating the meaningfulness of meaning. That is what I find fault with in the approach of Analytic Philosophy to the question of meaning as I have tried to show in “On What Is Real: An Answer to Quine’s ‘On What There Is’”.

The verbal locution “I am in pain” can be or mean various things. It can be an expression of pain when, all alone, I shriek it out to myself. It can be an informative statement when I speak it to my physician. It can be a meaningful proposition when I am introspectively reflecting and say, “I know that I am in pain.” Here the predicate ‘in pain’ is not an expression of pain but the concept of being in pain.

If we refuse to admit the reality of subjectivity, then of course ‘to know that I am in pain’ can only have a behavioural meaning. But if subjectivity, as I maintain, is our only access to reality, then ‘to know’ can be used in two distinct senses, so that I can say that others can know that I am in pain, in one valid sense, and that they cannot know my pain, in another valid sense. (We can of course restrict the term ‘know’ to one of these two senses and find another word for the other sense, but that is simply a matter of terminology.)

So does that make solipsism logically unassailable as has often been asserted? Only if we undertake to deal with the problem on the solipsist’s own terms. F. H. Bradley formulates the problem in this way: “I cannot transcend experience, and experience is my experience. From this it follows that nothing beyond myself exists.” But does it follow? Only if we fail to distinguish between two senses of the personal pronoun.

When I say that “experience is my experience” I am using the personal pronoun as a token of subjectivity. I am my subjectivity; that is true: but in that sense I am nothing else. All else – including everything that goes into the other ‘I’ – is outside me.

It is true, indeed it is tautologous, to say that all I know falls ... within my experience; that all I know is only known to me as object of my intelligence. But this only means that I can only know it in so far as I subject it to forms projected by my intelligence. It does not mean that its existence depends on my intelligence. Its existence, its givenness, is always there, staring me in

the face, pressing in upon me. My very body; my impulses, my cravings, my pangs and my exhilarations; the whole of my being in so far as it is in any way objective, is given, and the function of my intelligence is to redeem that givenness by conferring upon it forms that transform it into intelligible experience indissolubly bound up with the subject: to redeem it, I say, not to negate it. (LUP, Bk. One, ch. 7, sect. 11.)

So there is no need for me to “transcend experience” in order to admit the existence of an ‘external’ world. The world as object of my experience is outside ‘me’ as subject, and the world as sum-total of things extends far beyond the ‘me’ that is a fragment of that world.

What of there being other persons, other minds? (I have my reasons for not using the word ‘existence’ here.) F. C. S. Schiller defines solipsism as “the doctrine that all existence is experience and that there is only one experient.” What does the solipsist that falls under this definition demand? “That the subjectivity of others be transmuted into his own subjectivity? Or that it somehow be turned into objectivity for his scrutiny? ... I know other persons in the only manner in which persons can be known. I know them as I know reality; I know them by their creative activity, by their autonomy; I know them in love given and received.” (LUP.)

## WHERE IS I?

An examination of Gilbert Ryle's

"Courses of Action or the Uncatchableness of Mental Acts"

[First published in *Philosophy Pathways*

[http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_68.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_68.html)]

Prefatory note:

Thanks to the generous initiative of Professor T. R. Miles, an important, previously unpublished, lecture of Gilbert Ryle's has appeared in *Philosophy* (Vol: 75, no 293, pp.331-351). "Courses of Action or the Uncatchableness of Mental Acts", prepared only two years before his death in 1976, continues Ryle's lifelong concern to exorcise the Cartesian 'ghost in the machine' and encapsulates Ryle's philosophy of mind in a fresh attempt to explain the reason why both Cartesian Introspectionism and Behaviourism fail to 'catch' mental acts. In examining Ryle's important paper, I seek to show that, while the reason advanced by Ryle adequately explains why Introspectionists and Behaviourists and others are ever doomed to fail to 'catch' any mental act, there is a more fundamental reason that Ryle, with his Empiricist approach, has no place for in his philosophy. If mind and body are two dimensions of one thing, then all actual human doings can be represented in terms of bodily happenings, yielding linguistic formulations. Subjective reality remains ineffable because language deals only with objective things and happenings, not with subjective realities. To deny or to forget those realities and to

believe that the actually existent is all there is, is a grave error.

## I.

Ryle begins by depicting the problem of the uncatchableness of mental acts from an introspectionist perspective. When we try to describe “the ways in which we had been mentally occupied” while thinking, our attempts “are always total failure.” Why? Ryle rejects *en passant* the Freudian explanation of the elusiveness of mental acts by inventing a Subconscious or Unconscious Mind in which they hide away. He then suggests it might be “our ideas of act-description or process-chronicling that [are] the source of the trouble.” To illustrate this suggestion he offers an allegory. A camera-proud boy at the zoo after happily snapping a variety of the zoo’s denizens, follows a finger-post marked ‘Mammals’ and takes photos of a lion, a wolf, an otter, but looks in vain for a mammal. The boy sees ‘Danger’ notices displayed here and there, but cannot have a photo of Danger to keep on his album. “The term ‘danger’ is semantically too sophisticated or of too High an Order to permit it to occupy sentence-vacancies that welcome specific terms like ‘lion’, or even generic terms like ‘mammal’ and ‘danger’.”

Ryle then promises “to show, in partial analogy, that our powers of thought-description can be baffled by their would-be objects being, like dangers, semantically of too High an(d) Order.” He is to find a place “for the notion of Thinking, between our so-called ‘outer’ and our so-called ‘inner’ lives, between reductionism and duplicationism about ‘mental acts’ and ‘mental processes’.” So, by analogy to the distinction between the lion and the otter, on the one hand, which the boy could snap, and, on the other hand, the Mammal and the Danger that he could not locate, Ryle now draws a distinction, with an abundance of illustrative examples, between an action, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a course of action or chain-undertaking or Super-action. An example of action is eating this piece of cake or whistling to your puppy; an example of a chain-undertaking is dieting or puppy-training. Dieting, puppy-training, exploring, researching,

are not actions but “purposive Higher Order chain undertakings under which various actions proper are tactically conducted.”

## II.

I will now offer some comments to show why I find this explanation interesting, instructive, enlightening, but not completely satisfactory, because it offers to give us *Hamlet*, leaving out the Prince.

Gilbert Ryle is right about the uncatchableness of mental acts, and he is right in holding that neither reductionism nor duplicationism about ‘mental acts’ and ‘mental processes’ can give us the understanding we need. However, Ryle’s own position is a species of reductionism. In common with all Analytical philosophers, he thinks that when we have created a conceptual distinction, that’s where we have to stop. They are interested in ‘mental acts’, ‘mental processes’ – as acts and processes – and in the conceptual pigeon-holes in which we can conveniently range those acts and processes. The activity itself which does all that, which is truly uncatchable because unobjectifiable, is of no practical importance and can be left out of the account.

Ryle, speaking of chain-undertakings, says, “A snapshot cannot, but a cinematograph-film might show an explorer exploring.” I would say that neither would a cinematograph-film, nor anything in any way objective, show an explorer exploring. The cinematograph-film would show what Ryle calls ‘variegated infra-acts’ (which he emphatically and correctly distinguishes from the overall chain-undertaking), but only the idea of exploration in the explorer’s mind can make of those infra-acts an integral part, a meaningful moment, of the activity of exploration.

Ryle argues that the Behaviourist would be wrong in concluding that dieting is an action or an activity, since it is a course of action. These distinctions are useful but they can never be hard and fast; besides, we don’t need that for showing that Behaviourism does not give an adequate account of mental events. No action, however simple, however seemingly instantaneous, is actually an irreducible particle of action. The reception by

the eye of a ray of light (I intentionally put it as naively as possible) is no more susceptible of being reduced to atomic constituents (in the logical, not the physical, sense of the term 'atom') than our good old solid matter has proved to be.

He admits: "We have no regulations to fix what shall and what shall not count as a single action rather than as a combination or sequence of numerically different actions; and we have no regulations to fix what shall count as an action and not as a mere reaction, reflex, output of energy, automatism, or spasm." This admission virtually negates the distinction. It is, strictly speaking, impossible to find any 'single' action that is truly single. I have a cup of coffee before me. Not even each single sip is a single action: I stretch my arm, hold the cup, raise it to my lips, sip, swallow: each of these 'simple' acts in turn can be broken down into others. A single instant, a single impression, a single reflex, a single spasm, are all fictions, useful and indispensable fictions, but fictions nonetheless.

While rightly seeking to show the inadequacy of Behaviourism and reductionism in dealing with chain-undertakings, Ryle reduces the chain-undertaking or supra-action to a token word without any content. After giving a long list of examples "of familiar kinds of things in our adherence to which we are engaging in courses of action o[r] chain-undertakings", he says, "A person follows a programme of any of these and other kinds ... only by regularly or duly (etc.) conducting his appropriate infra-actions in intentional subordination to the programme." Where does that leave the programme? The programme of course is an idea, but an idea which is and must be of very poor specificity. No infra-action is included in all its minute details in the programme, and yet it is not a chance happening or an arbitrary action. It is shaped by the programme in virtue of a plasticity in the programme; but that plasticity would be impossible if the programme were nothing but an abstract idea; the plasticity comes from the creativity of the mind in which alone the programme has its being.

The Behaviourist, when he finds that "the student's supposedly unique action of studying the German language cannot be equated" with this or that particular action, is driven to identify it instead "with some particular but

jellyfishy, ‘internal’ act or process”, and this, Ryle finds, is absurd. “The category-difference of, say, the particular action of eating a piece of toast from the Higher Order course of action of dieting was misconstrued as the supposed mere ‘sortal’ difference of doing a particular overt or bodily thing from doing a particular crypto or ‘mental’ thing.” But the fault lies not in propounding a distinction between an overt or bodily thing and an internal or mental thing, but in regarding that ‘thing’, as an act, and, equally seriously, in seeking to identify the ‘Higher Order course’ with anything whatever. The supra-action, chain-undertaking, programme, or however you name it, is not to be identified with this or that, but is to be found in the mind, as a creative issue of living intelligence.

### III.

Ryle believes that the uncatchableness of mental acts is explained by their being thought-complexes involving subordinate clauses. That is a good piece of logical analysis. But what sustains those injunctions (programmes, etc.) comprising the subordinate clauses? What gives them the virtue of unfolding, realizing themselves in a manifold of related particular acts, processes, etc? It is that they inhere in a living, active, creative mind, that itself is uncatchable not because it is a phantom or a slippery jellyfish or a second- or third-order logical entity, but because it is a reality that, since its nature is to be the *archê* and *aitia* of all existence, cannot itself exist.

Second-order concepts have no existence. Empiricists conclude that they are nothing but words. No; they are not mere words: they are realities without which existents do not exist for us. They constitute the reality of our being as intelligent beings.

Further on we read, “Waiting for a train, like keeping a secret o[r] postponing writing a letter, is not an action. ... Rather it is a course of action or a chain-undertaking with a negative supra-purpose tactically governing its infra-actions and inactions.” Ryle’s argument, in common with all Analytical philosophy, suffers from a mental blind spot. When Analytical philosophers have succeeded in giving a good analysis of a concept, they are

no longer interested in the meaningfulness of the concept. Being fundamentally Empiricists they are not only ready to, but are determined to, forget about the mind behind the meaning. Thus we have seen Ryle willing to find a place “between our so-called ‘outer’ and our so-called ‘inner’ lives”. In common with all empiricists and reductionists, he is willing to go to any length, invent endless distinctions, abstractions, fictions, all to avoid admitting the reality of the inner life. Once a thinker is committed to the dogma that only the objective is real, s/he will stop at nothing to escape the heresy of confessing the reality of the subjective.

#### IV.

Under the rubric ‘Application’, Ryle sums up what he means to achieve. I will quote this short paragraph in full:

I want, in the end, to achieve an impartially anti-Dualist and anti-Reductionist categorial(,) re-settlement of at least some ‘mental acts’ and ‘mental processes’, including, especially, the cogitations of *Le Penseur*. I am hoping to have found, in this notion of courses of action, a hitherto unsponsored categorial hostel in which the logical grammarian may, at once unmysteriously and unreductively, at once unprivately and publicly house the notion of pondering. In this hostel it will be under the same roof as (though on a higher and airier floor than) such notions as dieting, waiting, wheat-growing, exploring, spring-cleaning, studying, puppy-training, etc.

I have already stated the view that Ryle’s ‘anti-Reductionist’ position is itself a species of reductionism. By ‘anti-Dualist’, moreover, Ryle obviously means to indicate a position opposed to the assertion of the reality of subjective states — in other words, the reality of the mind, hence the scare-quotes wherever the word ‘mental’ occurs.

Ordinary Language philosophers seem to think that by collecting as many specimens as possible of particular instances of a given concept, they have exhausted or come as closely as is practically possible to exhausting the meaning of the concept. They have not absorbed the first lesson of the



Socratic elenchus, namely, that drawing up an inventory of instances is not the same thing as grasping the meaning of the concept. Ryle again and again lists tens of examples to show us that dieting is not only not the same thing as, but also not the same kind of thing, as eating; that practising is not only not the same thing, but also not the same kind of thing as doing. That is all very good as far as it goes, and the distinction drawn between the concept of action and that of a course of action is a useful and important distinction. But that bypasses the question of what is behind not only a course of action but even the simplest action — for the simplest of actions cannot bring itself about; its antecedents cannot bring it about: Hume long ago shattered that myth; only the creativity of an autonomous mind can bring anything about.

Ryle affirms, “Only where there is exploration, innovation, origination, enterprise or the essaying of something new, can there be experimenting; only where there is intentional repetition, acclimatisation, rehearsal, consolidation or self-drilling can there be the intention to school oneself in something.” That is well-said. But we are nowhere given any hint as to whom or to what that exploration, innovation, and intention are to be credited. Ryle at this point would of course be irritated by my stupidity: the whole point is that these things are not to be credited to anyone or any-what because they are no-thing, no-action. But I will persist in being stupid: because they are no-thing and no-action they are a higher, purer, kind of ‘thing’ — they are projects, intentions, etc., which will never have any actual existence : Agreed! Yet the particular existent instances of those projects, intentions, etc., could never come to exist but for the mind in which they germinate and breed their progeny blessed with respectable existentiality. If our insistence on this brands us with stupidity, let us on top of that be impudent enough to say that those who deny it are simply obstinately refusing to acknowledge that they themselves are not merely existent but have a reality over and above their existence.

All of this applies *pari passu* to the problem of thinking. Someone trying to solve a problem, as Ryle rightly affirms, “is certainly to be described, with hardly a tinge of metaphor, as exploring or researching.” Ryle also rightly affirms that the thinker’s thinking “does not reduce” to the

“subordinated various infra-actions, steps or moves”. What then? My point is that we cannot stop here. There is still one more thing that we need to bring out: the “various infra-actions, steps or moves” cannot come into being, cannot happen, without the reality (which in my usage is not the same thing as, but opposed to, existence) of a mind behind them.

Ryle concludes, “We now know one unmysterious reason why our attempts, whether introspective or behavioural, to ‘catch’ oneself or another thinking performing the mental acts of which, while still grammatically hobbled, we expected Thought to consist is the same as the reason why we would equally vainly try to catch oneself or someone else in the here-and-now act of puppy-training’ etc.” I am at one with Ryle in maintaining that both introspectionists and behaviourists are equally engaged in a wild-goose chase. But I further maintain that the reason why they will never catch their goose is not for the “unmysterious reason” that thinking is a Higher Order undertaking and that introspectionists and behaviourists fail to note the distinction between actions and courses of action, but rather the – in a sense – truly mysterious reason that we have minds whose nature is to be real but never to exist objectively.

## V.

Today, neuroscientists and philosophers of mind are like a child standing before a mirror, perplexedly saying, “Here is my nose, here are my eyes, here are my arms, ... but where is I?” The I, the mind, is not a ‘ghost in the machine’, for that was Descartes’s gravest sin, that he broke up the whole person into a machine that could not move itself and a mind that was a mere phantom. Spinoza saw at once that that was a nonstarter: he restored the wholeness of Nature, the wholeness of Reality, the wholeness of the Person, but philosophers would not listen and continued to knock about errantly between Cartesian dualism and Empiricist phenomenalism.

Ryle, like all Analytic philosophers who share a common Empiricist background, in showing the error of Descartes’s dualism did not, like A. N. Whitehead, restore the wholeness of the whole but was content with the

objective half. Naturally, if mind and body are two aspects or two dimensions of one thing, as Spinoza thought, then all actual human doings can be successfully represented in terms of bodily happenings. The temptation then to forget about the ‘inner’ (the spatial metaphor is bad but pardonable) aspect is great, and great are its pernicious consequences.

Because the Cartesian body was confessedly a machine, the mind inhering in it could be justly pilloried as a ‘ghost in the machine’, but I, writing these words, know that I am I and am not a category mistake. Ryle would say that the fact that I obviously and necessarily stammer in making this statement shows that I am speaking of a chimera. I answer, No; my reality is ineffable because language has been developed to deal with objective things and happenings, not with subjective realities. The poets trick language into conveying subjective realities – love, hope, fear –, and philosophers, to give articulate expression to those realities, have to clothe those in myth as Plato knew. To deny or to forget those realities and to believe that the actually existent is all there is, is the death of humanity.

# FREE WILL AS CREATIVITY

[Parts I and II of this paper were originally published in *The Examined Life Journal*, Issues 16 and 18; Part III was to be published in the following issue which, unfortunately, never saw the light. An abridged version was published in *Philosophy Pathways*.]

## PART ONE

### HISTORICAL SURVEY

The so-called free-will problem is a spurious problem. It need not have arisen but for two unjustified assumptions (or two classes of assumptions). The ancient Greek philosophers did not raise the problem since they had no reason to question the reality of the experience of free will. Even the deeply rooted and widely accepted notion of Fate did not radically contradict the experience of free will. Fate (or the Fates) could plot a person's fortunes and the caprice of the gods could bring about the undoing of an individual but they did not work on the will of that person. Prometheus could maintain his integrity and his dignity in the face of mighty Zeus.

For Socrates and for Plato the problem was, What sways the decisions of a human being: reason, or emotion, or desire? But in all cases the final arbiter was the person her/him/self. To them, that a rational being acts freely was self-evident. Socrates' examination of *akrasia* in the *Protagoras*, Plato's

distinction between volition and intention in the *Laws*, Aristotle's discussion of intentional and unintentional acts in the *Ethica Nicomachea*, all relate to the problem of choice, not to the problem of free will as it was later posed, first by Christian and Islamic thinkers with reference to the ideas of predestination and divine foreknowledge, and then by modern philosophers with reference to the scientific concept of causal determinism. (See section 4 below for the distinction I draw between free will and choice.) Neither Socrates nor Plato nor Aristotle finds any reason to question the reality of the freedom of the will. For them to be free is to act intelligently and not be swayed by desires and aims unilluminated by the light of reason.

The Atomists of classical times (Democritus, Leucippus, Lucretius) apparently did not pay much attention to any possible repercussions of their theories on the question of human freedom. Plato at *Laws* 967a says, "'Tis the common belief that men who busy themselves with such themes are made infidels by their astronomy and its sister sciences, with their disclosure of a realm where events happen by stringent necessity, not by the purpose of a will bent on the achievement of good" (tr. A. E. Taylor). But Plato here ties the postulate of physical necessity with atheism, not with any scepticism concerning free will. In any case Epicurus (who adopted the physical theory of Democritus and Leucippus) was confident we can control our fortunes.

The Stoics believed that all that happens is providentially directed, but they did not see that as precluding the freedom of a human being to live in harmony with the divine will.

Monotheism does not hold merely that – in the words of Thomas Aquinas – "God is the cause of the operation of everything which operates." That would not preclude autonomy as understood by Spinoza. But monotheism in the main, Islamic as well as Christian, maintains further that God has decreed beforehand all action that will ever take place. That clearly makes human beings sheer automata on a par with the animals of Descartes. Monotheists exert themselves to prove that God's foreknowledge does not determine the deeds of human beings. Permitting them all their subterfuges, what do they gain when, on the other hand, they positively affirm that all we do is foreordained by God?

From the seventeenth century onwards, the debates about free will and predestination, originally raised in the theological arena, were given new life as a result of the mechanical determinism of Hobbes and Descartes and the metaphysical necessity entailed in Leibniz' pre-established harmony and Spinoza's rationalistic pantheism.

Hobbes (1588-1679) was a consistent materialist. Taking his stand on the naturalistic and materialistic attitude of Francis Bacon (1561-1626), he was perhaps the first among moderns to give clear expression to the idea of causal determinism. If all there is in the universe is matter in motion, then free will can be nothing but an illusion. "When in the mind of man, Appetites and Aversions, Hopes, and Feares, concerning one and the same thing, arise alternately; ... the whole summe of Desires, Aversions, Hopes and Fears, continued till the thing be either done, or thought impossible, is that we call DELIBERATION." Further on we read, "In Deliberation, the last Appetite, or Aversion, immediately adhæring to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that we call the WILL; the Act (not the faculty,) of Willing." (*Leviathan*, Part I., chap. VI, Everyman, 1914, 1924, p.28.) This, I say, is consistent materialism. And Hobbes is still very much with us today. As long as we find reality in what is given in the phenomenal world, Hobbes' conclusion is inescapable. Only if we find reality in the mind can we find room for free will.

Descartes (1596-1650) and Spinoza (1632-77) were mathematicians and carried the idea of mathematical necessity into metaphysics where it does not belong, just as Plato was inclined to do at times; but Plato was a far profounder thinker and had the audacity to be inconsistent when his philosophical insight demanded it. As mathematicians, Descartes and Spinoza maintained that, given the set-up of the world at any given moment, the outcome for all time was determined. Leibniz (1646-1716) too was a mathematician, but, like Plato, dared to be inconsistent, though at times he was inconsistent in the wrong place, motivated not by insight but by fear of the Church.

Spinoza equates freedom with understanding; he titles the Fifth Part of his *Ethics* "Concerning the Power of the Intellect or Human Freedom". For him

the important consideration is not whether in behaving we are determined or free, but whether we are passive or active. For, for him, all that comes to pass is necessitated. But the more understanding we have of ourselves and of the world, the more of perfection we have in ourselves, and the more free we are in the only sense in which a finite being can be free. This is a noble conception of freedom, and the only one compatible with strict causal determinism. Spinoza could not go beyond that, fettered as he was by his acquiescence in that postulate.

Spinoza, being an honest man, accepted without demur the consequences of the causal determinism he thought incontrovertible. Leibniz, who was by no means less intelligent or clear-headed than Spinoza, would have done the same. Somewhere he says, "To ask whether there is freedom in our will, is the same as asking whether there is will in our will. Free and voluntary mean the same thing." (G. IV. 362.) And again, "Whatever acts, is free in so far as it acts." (G. I. 331.) But Leibniz was not a heroic man; he was not prepared to face the ostracism and drudgery that were imposed on Spinoza in consequence of his beliefs. So Leibniz juggled with words to show that there can be predetermination without necessity. As Bertrand Russell puts it:

"Leibniz recognized ... that all psychical events have their causes, just as physical events have, and that prediction is as possible, theoretically, in the one case as in the other. To this he was committed by his whole philosophy, and especially by the pre-established harmony. He points out that the future must be determined, since any proposition about it must be already true or false. ... And with this, if he had not been resolved to rescue free will, he might have been content. The whole doctrine of contingency might have been dropped with advantage. But that would have led to a Spinozistic necessity, and have contradicted Christian dogma." (*The Philosophy of Leibniz*, 1900, Sect. 118.)

The distinction between inclining and necessitating, to which Leibniz resorts, is mere word-jugglery, just like the distinction between necessity and contingency when taken out of the sphere of logic and is supposed to

have significance in the metaphysical sphere.

It is odd that Hume (1711-76), who was the first to shatter the idea of causation as a law inherent in nature, should yet be seen by causal determinists as a champion of their cause. For, ironically, while empiricists proudly announce themselves descendants of Hume, they choose to forget that he showed all our pretensions to knowledge to be nothing better than pious dreams. In *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section VIII, Of Liberty and Necessity, Part I, Hume argues that there is as much uniformity in human character and human behaviour as is to be found in nature. He calls this necessity. Since people – among them philosophers – when observing regular succession in nature suppose that there is a force which necessitates that the ‘effect’ should follow the ‘cause’, by the same token, when we observe regularity in human behaviour, we should regard that as necessity. This is good as far as it goes, and though it sits uneasily with the rest of Hume’s philosophy, let us concede it to him. Where does it take us? Only to the point that all human activity is sufficiently ‘caused’, which does not conflict with the view that principles and ideals can be effective factors in determining human activity. By itself, Hume’s argument does not entail or support predetermination.

Determinism, interpreted in a sufficiently broad manner, as a corollary of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, would be incontrovertible. Every happening must be rationally justified. But this is not how determinism is commonly understood.

## CAUSAL DETERMINISM

The classic statement of the postulate of causal determinism was formulated by Pierre Laplace (1749-1827) in his *Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*:

“We ought to regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its antecedent state and as the cause of the state that is to follow. An intelligence knowing all the forces acting in nature at a given instant, as well as the momentary positions of all things in the universe, would be able to comprehend in one single formula the motions of the largest



bodies as well as the lightest atoms in the world, provided that its intellect were sufficiently powerful to subject all data to analysis; to it nothing would be uncertain, the future as well as the past would be present to its eyes. The perfection that the human mind has been able to give to astronomy affords but a feeble outline of such an intelligence” (as quoted in Carl Hoefer’s important article “Causal Determinism” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

The sanguine effusion of Laplace was in full tune with his age and time. This was the logical outcome of the Cartesian version of rationalism. In more recent times, mathematicians, physicists, and philosophers of science have made it more difficult to display such exuberant confidence. However, for the purposes of the present essay, it does not matter whether determinism be taken at this high pitch or in any toned-down version.

Determinism rests on two postulates:

1. Everything that happens is subject to the ‘universal laws of nature’.
2. Everything that happens is theoretically predictable, being the outcome of causes which were in turn caused by antecedent causes.

Both these assumptions are useful scientific fictions that can never be anything other than that. They are as certain and as reliable as any human knowledge can be and no more. Here for once we will find Plato and Hume speaking with one voice. All the astounding achievements of our civilization are based on these postulates. But they cannot permit us to make any absolute judgements. And I strongly contend that they are not relevant to philosophical positions which are concerned solely with subjective reality. (This is a position which I have been defending in all my writings and which I hope to vindicate in what follows. See also “Philosophy as Prophecy” and *Plato: An Interpretation*, ch. 6, “Knowledge and Reality”.)

I have neither competence nor desire to enter the lists of the controversies raging between scientists and philosophers of science on questions relating to determinism and causation. My position is that whatever theory be found

most satisfactory in these areas will have relevance only in the domain of observable objective phenomena. However much power we may possess to control, influence, or predict the sequences of these phenomena, we do not thereby gain understanding of what makes things do what they do. Most scientifically oriented minds are firm in the conviction that once we are master of the steps that ensure the coming about of a thing, we have understanding of that thing. There is a legitimate and practically important sense in which we can take that to be what we commonly mean by understanding. If medical scientists come to know how to control the development of a malignant growth, it would be consistent with common usage to call that understanding. But clear thinking would profit by our using distinct terms for that kind of knowledge on the one hand and philosophical understanding on the other hand.

To our modern minds, to say that science has no say in any given question is far worse than blasphemy, because in the modern mind science is equated with rationality. I contend that that is a serious error leading to serious consequences. Science deals with phenomena objectively given to the mind, and regardless of whether or not we acknowledge that those phenomena are to any extent influenced or modified by the mind, in our scientific proceedings we can only deal with those phenomena on the assumption that they are, or in so far as they are regarded as, independent of the mind. Even when science proposes to deal with subjective experience and with the activity of the mind, it can only do so by objectifying that experience and that activity and transforming them into given phenomena.

That – the scientific procedure – is a method that has given humankind power over nature. I do not have to recount its gifts; every schoolchild can do that. But it is a power that comes at a price. It is by its very nature excluded from access to the reality of living experience and of the activity of active thought. When the mind dives in its own living waters, it exercises a rationality of a different order.

After what I have said about causality as a fiction serviceable only in the study of the phenomenal world, it would be beside the point to refer to Quantum Mechanics and the Principle of Indeterminacy. These are purely

matters of scientific theory to be discussed and decided by the methods of science. As I maintain that philosophical thinking and philosophical questions are a radically different affair, I must reiterate that whichever way the scientific controversy goes will have no relevance to the philosophical problem of free will.

I will sum up my approach to the problem of causation in a few naïve claims which, I maintain, are meaningful and significant despite their *naïveté*.

There is no instance in nature of A, simply as A, being the cause of B. If A develops into B or grows into B, then A is a living or a dynamic system (a whole); there is always in system-A something over and above all that any reductionist inventory of the constituents of an A fictionally congealed in a moment of time can discover.

To say that a combination of factors  $A+B+C = X$  is patently false except where X is nothing but a token for  $A+B+C$ , that is, except where the statement is strictly tautologous. Where X is in any sense different from  $A+B+C$ , we have a creative development that the sum  $A+B+C$  cannot explain. I maintain that this is so even in the case of  $1+1+1 = 3$ . Three is not one-and-one-and-one but a new form, a new idea; in fact, a creation of the mind that can be found nowhere in the world except where a living mind confers it on the world. (I have no intention of using any standard notation of symbolic logic; so please don't tell me that my use of symbols is all wrong.)

Thus I see not only all intelligent purposive activity but all becoming as an original flowering of its antecedents. (See my *Let Us Philosophize*, particularly Book Two, chapter 4.) I find creativity as self-evidently present as the reality of freedom in our subjective reality, which is the only reality we know. And accordingly I can only suppose that creativity is an original feature of ultimate reality in the same way as I find intelligence and goodness essential dimensions of ultimate reality. And if that is so, then causality and determinism must be kept in their place as scientific hypotheses useful in dealing with the phenomenal world but with no say in the metaphysical sphere, which is concerned with the world of reality, the only reality we know, the reality of ideas and of the mind that is the matrix

of ideas.

In an important article on Causal Determinism in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Professor Carl Hoefer states that philosophers of science now “mostly prefer to drop the word ‘causal’ from their discussions of determinism.” He quotes John Earman to the effect that not to do so is to “seek to explain a vague concept – determinism – in terms of a truly obscure one – causation.” So it would seem that scientists, philosophers of science, and professional philosophers who confidently and unqualifiedly proclaim that determinism has been either proved or refuted represent neither the best of science nor the best of philosophy.

## THE COMPATILITY-INCOMPATIBILITY DEBATE

The Compatibility-Incompatibility controversy is fuelled by the acceptance, common to both parties, of causal determinism as an incontrovertible postulate of science. Once that is admitted, all the arguments are nothing but tautology on the one side and evasion on the other side. In a theoretically closed system, where every happening is causally determined by the antecedently obtaining set-up, Incompatibilism regiments and deploys the forces of heaven and earth to assert that what is determined cannot be undetermined, and Compatibilism has no resort but to seek clever forms of words and equations that seem not to contradict the ‘truth’ of causal determinism.

Antony Flew (*An Introduction to Western Philosophy*, 1971), following Leibniz, seeks to escape the conclusion that causal determinism entails inevitability by distinguishing between the necessity of the law of causation (if the cause obtains, the effect will necessarily obtain) on the one hand, and the contingency of the effect (there is no logical contradiction in affirming that the effect could have been otherwise) on the other hand. This distinction does not serve Flew’s purpose. The ideas of necessity and contingency are second-order ideas, pertaining to logic. On the ground, whenever the cause obtains, then, under causal determinism, the effect cannot but obtain. Effect (a determinate effect) follows cause (a determinate cause) as surely as night

follows day (though this itself is something contingent). We cannot escape the inevitability of our actions by logic; we escape it by grace of the fortunate circumstance that the cause is never perfect, never a closed system. When Shelley's Prometheus (in *Prometheus Unbound*) cries out

It doth repent me; words are quick and vain;  
Grief for a while is blind, and so was mine.  
I wish no living thing to suffer pain,

it is no consolation to him to reflect that the grief that blinded him for a while and made him utter the curse was logically contingent. The curse was uttered ineluctably. But had he controlled his grief for a while longer and remembered the sentiment "I wish no living thing to suffer pain", he would have withheld the curse. But in all of this we are still moving in the area of deliberation and choice, which, I maintain, is not the core of the free will.

Kant (1724-1804) is the greatest of Compatibilists. In a footnote to a passage in the Preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant writes, "The union of causality as freedom with causality as rational mechanism, the former established by the moral law, the latter by the law of nature in the same subject, namely, man, is impossible, unless we conceive him with reference to the former as a being in himself, and with reference to the latter as a phenomenon — the former in pure consciousness, the latter in empirical consciousness. Otherwise reason contradicts itself" (tr. T. K. Abbott, p.16).

This establishes a pact of non-belligerence between empirical science and morality, a policy of live and let live. (The empiricists have never honoured the pact!) But unless we realize that causal determinism is not and can never be anything more than a working hypothesis that cannot claim absolute validity, then the reconciliation between causal determinism and freedom cannot be any deeper than Kant makes it. Only when we realize that all becoming is creative, is freedom firmly and securely established. Then all the arguments of Compatibilism and Incompatibilism are seen to be beside the point. (See detailed comments on Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* below.)

## CHOICE

Many of those who concern themselves with the philosophical problem of free will see the problem as revolving around the question whether it is true to say that, in a given situation, a person could do otherwise than s/he does. This, in my view, is not the crux of the problem of free will. That question is a psychological – not a philosophical – one, and the yes or no to it depends on the level of motivation at which we choose to stop. Discussions are thus mainly, often exclusively, engrossed in the examination of the intricacies of the psychology of choice and deliberation. This befuddles the issue.

Choice and deliberation follow from the circumstance that we have the power to objectify our desires, inclinations, aims, and so on, and to constitute of ourselves an arbiter over and above the desires, inclinations, and aims. We are no longer passively moved by those motives but can bring one motive, ideal, or value, to work on the others. Still this capacity to deliberate and exercise choice is not the freedom that constitutes our true worth as human beings.

Farah, my granddaughter (2 yrs 5 m.), is crying. She wants to go downstairs to play with the neighbours' children. "I want to play," she cries. Of course, except when sleeping or feeding, she does nothing all the time but play. When she takes up one of her toys or goes to her swing, she does something she wants to do, but we may regard that as a first-level desire. But now, crying "I want to play", she has the idea of a possibility that is not at the moment actual. This we may regard as a second-level desire. Here we have a higher plane of autonomy. Of course this is still a far cry from moral autonomy. But I think we must recognize that here we already have an ideal sphere that has a role in moulding action. I will not say that the idea affects or influences the act; it does not act from outside; it is not a separate thing; it, along with other factors, acts itself out in the act. I call that a plane or stage of autonomy.

One point that I have to make clear and insist on is that although we habitually think of the will as a faculty that can be distinguished from the totality of the person, we should never forget that this distinction is a

theoretical fiction. (Hobbes was perfectly right when he identified the Will with “the Act (not the faculty,) of Willing”, as quoted above.) We can and do distinguish the will just as we distinguish desire, emotion, memory, etc. Such distinctions are the stuff of thought. But they are fictions. It is the whole person, the person as a whole, that acts, thinks, deliberates, decides, and so on. Wherever I speak of the will, we might replace the word will by mind or soul. Where such substitution makes no sense, there must be something wrong with the original statement.

Let it be said at once that, even within the scope of deliberation and choice, to say that the will is undetermined is not to say that the act of the will is uncaused. The act as an actual happening must be sufficiently justified. To say that the will is undetermined is to say that the will (which here can be equated with the mind or soul), even when subjected to external pressures, acts in fulfilment of its own constitution.

Thus free will is not in any sense “the operation of an uncaused cause”, and it would only make for confusion to take that to be the meaning of spontaneity. A person, with all her/his aptitudes, motives, goals, ideals, is a natural product of preceding natural processes, including ‘spiritual’ influences which, coming from outside the person, are so far objective and natural.

We all know that it is no compliment to any person to be characterized as unpredictable. A person whose acts are unpredictable is either a shallow thing driven by every whim and every puff of circumstance, or is a vicious, wily, scheming rogue. An honest, virtuous person’s acts are always consistent with her/his character and principles.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Equally with the question of choice, I regard the discussion of responsibility as an intrusion into the metaphysical problem of the free will. The discussion of responsibility is on one side a psychological question and on the other side a legal or politico-social question. In both these aspects it is of course a

fit subject for philosophical investigation in a wider sense of the term philosophical; what I am denying is that it is of any relevance to the strictly metaphysical problem of the meaning of free will.

A person who, under compulsion, does a wrongful deed, may be legally exonerable, and yet may be held to be morally responsible, because s/he has weighed the consequences of doing and of not doing and has chosen to do, when s/he could have chosen to die, for instance, rather than do the deed. But if someone bodily much stronger than I am clasps my hand to a gun, points it, and presses my finger to the trigger, this would not be an act of mine any more than if I fell from a high building and in falling crushed and killed an unfortunate person that happened to be standing below. In both these cases, the event, as far as I am concerned, takes place on the physical plane, not on the plane of my subjective reality.

Edward Westermarck (*Ethical Relativity*, 1932, p.181) argues that determinism does not conflict with responsibility. He seeks to explain “the fallacy which is at the bottom of the notion that moral valuation is inconsistent with determinism.” He thinks that to hold that position is to confound determinism with fatalism. After asserting that “the logical outcome of radical fatalism is a denial of all moral imputability and a rejection of all moral judgment”, he goes on to say, “Not so with determinism. While fatalism presupposes the existence of a person who is constrained by an outward power, determinism regards the person himself as in every respect a product of causes. It does not assume any part of his will to have existed previous to his formation by the causes; his will cannot possibly be constrained by them because there is nothing to constrain, it is made by them.” But what is this but to negate the personality of the person? If fatalism is “a denial of all moral imputability”, determinism is a denial of all personality, and what is left then to hold responsible? Approval or disapproval of an action is then reduced to one or both of two things: an expression of our subjective pleasure or displeasure and a measure for encouraging or deterring such actions — if that could still make sense under determinism.



## RECAPITULATION

I maintain that the Determinism and Free Will ‘problem’, which many thinkers have declared intractable, is a pseudo-problem, engendered by raising a scientific hypothesis – which (1) is uncertain and unverifiable, and (2) in any case has no relevance to philosophical inquiry – to the status of a first principle. This error is closely linked to the prevailing Empiricist outlook, which sees ‘reality’ in the phenomenal world and not in the mind.

The pseudo-problem is further confounded by the identification of freedom with choice. On top of that, the proper understanding of the metaphysical problem of free will is hindered by the common static conception of reality, which fails to recognize creativity as an ultimate principle. To me, creativity is the essence of free will.

The properly philosophical question relating to free will is simply this: What is free will? And it is answered not by any objective observation or experimentation; not by any subjective analysis; but, starting from an acknowledgment of the reality of spontaneous, purposive activity. Philosophical thinking creates notions in the light of which that reality is found to be intelligible.

In what follows I develop this approach, first in commenting on Kant’s second Critique, and then through comments on some papers by a number of contemporary philosophers.

## PART TWO

### KANT, *CRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON*

(Page references are to T. K. Abbott’s translation, 1996, from which all quotations below are taken)

The whole controversy about free will (the modern, scientific, as opposed to the earlier theological version) should have been put to rest with Kant’s first

*Critique*. In the words of the Preface to the second *Critique*, transcendental freedom, freedom in the absolute sense, is required by speculative reason “in its use of the concept of causality in order to escape the antinomy into which it inevitably falls, when in the chain of cause and effect it tries to think the *unconditioned*” (p. 13).

In the first *Critique* Kant finds that reason can only see the phenomenal world as a world of insubstantial shadows, which reason conjectures must have noumenal support, which however we can never know. But within us, in the moral act, we find that noumenon real and full of life, and only there do we have true causality. That is the long and the short of it.

Where Kant goes wrong is in trying to establish the reality of freedom apodeictically. True, he only purports to establish the necessity of the concept of freedom. But then, on his own principles – and as his critics were not slow to show – that does not prove the existence of freedom. There can be no proof of that, for freedom is not the kind of thing that can ‘exist’. (I wanted to write ‘exist objectively’, but that would have clashed with Kant’s own usage where ‘objective’ signifies rational, just as ‘practical’ with him signifies moral.) So Kant’s winged words about ‘the moral sense within’ sway the minds of more people than are persuaded by his theoretical arguments for the necessity of the concept.

Kant tortures himself and his readers by soaring into the thin air of second-order and third-order concepts in the hope of proving the actuality of moral freedom. He should have spared himself the trouble by acknowledging that however much we refine and sophisticate our theory, at some point we have to stop and say with Socrates, It is by Beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful. The idea of freedom is a reality; it has no actuality (existence) that can be discovered by any means, and the only ‘proof’ of its reality is its self-evidence. Any other ‘proof’ can be a precious piece of intellectual artistry, but can always be ‘proved’ to be flawed.

In the same way the ideas of God and Immortality (understood as eternity of the soul) are realities that give meaning to life, yet theoretically, as Kant himself admits, they remain mere ‘possibilities’. Nothing can show them as actualities. The idea of freedom does not differ essentially from these. Kant

asserts that there is a difference because he chooses to see the actualization of the moral law in the practical sphere as proof of the actuality of moral freedom. This only makes for confusion.

To understand Kant you have to think in terms of his concepts. That is, you have to put aside all you have learned and all you have thought for yourself, don Kant's mind, and think with that mind. Then you will see that everything must be just as Kant says it is. This of course is true in the case of all original thinkers, but as Kant has created a whole new conceptual world, it is more evident in his case.

The radical solution in modern times to the problem of free will (if it is to be regarded as a problem) is found in Kant's distinction between the subject as phenomenon and the subject as noumenon. The phenomenal subject is part of nature and acts under natural law. The noumenal subject is autonomous and free. This should have been enough to resolve the problem. All our acts have sufficient reason; nothing we do contradicts natural law; on the other hand, all acts done by us as persons are autonomous, spontaneous, and free. But Kant accepted without question the scientific presuppositions of his time, and hence could not remove altogether the apparent contradiction between phenomenal determinism and noumenal freedom. In this, Kant is in the same position as Spinoza whose great insight into the reality of moral autonomy was unduly limited by his unquestioning acceptance of causal determinism.

Kant is the opposite pole to Plato. Plato lets his philosophical insights clothe themselves in whatever conceptual garb they chance to find handy. A sympathetic reader can always easily penetrate to his meaning, and critics can always feast on his apparent contradictions. Kant's fondness for intricate, majestic theoretical structures obscures his great insights, and while admirers revel (justly) in the 'perfect' consistence of his towering architectonics (a favourite word with him), unfriendly critics can always find in the detailed concepts and minute distinctions infinite faults and endless contradictions, for nothing determinate can be free of imperfection.

Kant formulates Problem I in the *Analytic* thus: "Supposing that the mere legislative form of maxims is alone the sufficient determining principle of a

will, to find the nature of the will which can be determined by it alone” (p.43). He finds that “such a will must be conceived as quite independent on the natural law of phenomena in their mutual relation, namely, the law of causality; such independence is called *freedom* in the strictest, that is in the transcendental sense; consequently, a will which can have its law in nothing but the mere legislative form of the maxim is a free will” (p. 43). A fine exercise of reasoning. But if someone is to understand what it is to suppose the legislative form of maxims to be the determining principle of a will, that someone must have experienced the reality of free will. If, with Socrates, we begin with the self-evidence of the reality, we need no proof; if we rely on proof, anyone who does not acknowledge the reality can justly accuse us of playing tricks with words. (Anyone acquainted with contemporary philosophy can name a score of professional philosophers who will readily sign their names to that accusation.)

Kant’s philosophy of the Categorical Imperative gives creative expression to the reality of the moral experience. It builds a theoretical structure to articulate the reality. That is all any theory ever does: no theory exhausts the reality it represents; no theory is ever definitive; all reality is inexhaustible. (For a defence of these bald and bold utterances, see my *Let Us Philosophize*, passim, “Philosophy as Prophecy”, etc.) The theoretical edifices that can be erected to represent any given reality are without limit — just as poetic images of love are without limit; and if poets in our day no longer speak of love, it is not because the subject has been exhausted, but because there is so little of love in our modern life.

After telling us that what gives actions moral worth is “*that the moral law should directly determine the will*”, Kant tells us that “as to the question how a law can be directly and of itself a determining principle of the will (which is the essence of morality), this is, for human reason, an insoluble problem and identical with the question: how a free will is possible” (pp. 92-93). This is the deontological riddle that Kant has left as a legacy to philosophical controversy, to the endless delight of professional philosophers. Kant’s addiction to ‘pure’ concepts lies behind the riddle. For him all immediacy smacks of the empirical. He creates concepts and distinctions and decides

that these form the whole content of pure reason. He does not see that this alienates from reason the realities that those concepts and distinctions were created to represent. Thus while maintaining that “the objective reality of the moral law cannot be proved by any deduction ... [nor] proved *a posteriori* by experience, and yet it is firmly established of itself” (pp. 64-65), he still denies that we have any intuition of the moral law, but only a concept of the form of the law.

Kant rightly insists that autonomy as such does not preclude determinism. He insists that “it does not matter whether the principles which necessarily determine causality by a physical law reside *within* the subject or *without* him, or in the former case whether these principles are instinctive or are conceived by reason, if ... these determining ideas have the ground of their existence in time and in the *antecedent state*, and this again in an antecedent &c.” (p. 118). He rightly insists that moral freedom transcends causal determinism, but as he still upholds the validity of causal determinism for phenomena he has to rest content with an unresolved contradiction between the phenomenal and the noumenal orders. I maintain that this contradiction can only be overcome by the principle of creativity as an ultimate dimension of reality.

For Kant there is no speculative answer to the apparent contradiction of physical causality and freedom of the will. There is only a practical answer which Kant explicitly describes as faith. And of Kant’s three Postulates of Practical Reason – the existence of God, freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul – it is only the freedom of the will of which we have immediate awareness and which can therefore claim the self-evidence of an idea engendered by the mind. Had Kant chosen to be more consistent with his own critical philosophy and maintain that none of these ideas can be admitted to give us any knowledge of any existents external to our minds, he would have found the ideas of God (as ideal perfection) and the soul (as supra-temporal reality) possessed of the same self-evidence as intelligible realities, needing no proof and capable of no proof.

It hardly needs saying that a free will is not capricious. Kant says that a free will is determined by the form of the law. We can say that a free will is

determined by a principle or an ideal. The principle of sufficient reason is satisfied, and that is causal determinism if you will. Wherein then does the freedom of a free will consist? First, in autonomy: that is compatible with determinism: that is Spinoza's freedom. More important, free will is creative spontaneity, which shows that such determinism, if we have to use the word, demands the sufficiency of the grounds of the act, but does not dictate the outcome. Shakespeare scribbling a sonnet — every word, every syllable, is sufficiently grounded and literary critics and scholars can analytically reduce the sonnet to the motives, beliefs, prejudices, influences, desires, and what not, that went to its making. But Laplace's God could not foretell

But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,  
Leese but their show, their substance still lives sweet.

### PART THREE

[The six papers discussed in this Part all appear in *The Determinism and Freedom Philosophy Website*, edited by Ted Honderich, to which I am much indebted. I think these six papers are representative of present-day approaches to the question of free will within contemporary professional philosophy.]

PETER VAN INWAGEN:

“THE MYSTERY OF METAPHYSICAL FREEDOM”

Peter van Inwagen speaks of freedom (in one sense) as freedom from constraint. Of course there is no such thing as absolute freedom; even theistic theologians agree that there are things which God cannot do. Constraint simply limits the scope of theoretically possible choice. The instances given by Inwagen — paralysis, neurosis, poverty — are limiting but do not rule out Stoic freedom. Even the agoraphobic can choose either to

fight her/his phobia or to reconcile her/him/self to it and order her/his life accordingly. The constraint conditions the behaviour but does not determine it.

Inwagen holds that “there is a concept of freedom that is not a merely negative concept, and this concept is a very important one.” Further on Professor Inwagen says, “Metaphysical freedom ... is simply what is expressed by ‘can’.” After clearing some linguistic ambiguities about the word ‘can’, Inwagen goes on to consider ‘false philosophical theories’ related to uses of the word. He writes, “An example of such a theory would be: ‘I can do X’ means ‘There exists no impediment, obstacle, or barrier to my doing X; nothing prevents my doing X’.” I would not call this a theory but a definition, which may be of much or of little use, but which cannot be said to be either true or false. It is a definition that sidesteps the question of determinism and compatibility and incompatibility, and Professor Inwagen could have spared himself the trouble of trying to ‘refute’ the ‘theory’.

Inwagen then turns “to the question of the compatibility of determinism and metaphysical freedom.” He writes,

“I shall present an argument for the conclusion that determinism is incompatible with metaphysical freedom. Since, as we have seen, determinism and metaphysical freedom are compatible if metaphysical freedom (the concept expressed by ‘I can do X’) is a merely negative concept, this argument will in effect be an argument for the conclusion that metaphysical freedom is not a merely negative concept.”

Since Inwagen began by distinguishing ‘metaphysical freedom’ from ‘freedom from constraint’, what need do we have to argue that ‘metaphysical freedom’ is other than ‘a merely negative freedom’, which amounts to saying that it is other than ‘freedom from constraint’? Let us next look at the argument “for the conclusion that determinism is incompatible with metaphysical freedom”.

We are told that “unless we are *bona fide* miracle workers, we can make only such additions to the actual past as conform to the laws of nature. But

the only additions to the actual past that conform to a deterministic set of laws are the additions that are actually made ...” I can’t read into this anything more than the platitude: if determinism is true then determinism is true, and yet Inwagen considers this argument as having “great persuasive power”, though he does not find it conclusive. Those philosophers who regard it as evident that we are free and have yet accepted an argument for the incompatibility of determinism and metaphysical freedom, “have denied that the laws of nature and the past together determine a unique future.” Those philosophers, among whom Inwagen counts himself, face, as he tells us, a difficult problem. He questions whether “postulating or asserting that the laws of nature are indeterministic provide[s] any comfort to those who would like to believe in metaphysical freedom”. Why not? Inwagen articulates: “If the laws are indeterministic, then more than one future is indeed consistent with those laws and the actual past and present — but how can anyone have any choice about which of these futures becomes actual? Isn’t it just a matter of chance which becomes actual?” Here in these few lines we have, I think, three deadly errors, two of which I will simply point to, since they receive adequate treatment elsewhere in this essay, but the third, crystallizing one of the most serious faults of contemporary philosophy, deserves to be highlighted. The first error is the assumption that an undetermined act flouts the principle of sufficient reason; it is wrong to equate freedom with chance, which is a negative concept. The second error lurks in the word ‘choice’; it is wrong to tie the concept of freedom to that of choice.

Now the third to Olympian Zeus the Saviour, as Plato would say: we are told that if the laws are indeterministic, then more than one future is possible, and then the problem turns around “which of these futures becomes actual”. As in so much of modern philosophy, we create a fiction and then mistake it for an actuality. The idea of possibility is a fiction, a very useful and fruitful fiction, but it is not the name of any given actuality. An engineer mooting which of two designs to adopt for his commission is not considering possibilities but formed projects, and here we do have scope for choice. The engineer’s projects are first order ideas; the logician’s



presumption that the engineer could have chosen either project is a second order idea, a fiction without actuality. The possible worlds of Leibniz were a figment of his imagination which God never had before his mind. (See further below my comments on 'possible worlds' in my examination of Taylor's and Dennett's paper.) Mozart, composing a movement, would not weigh possibilities; only when the inspiration flagged would he waver between alternatives, and then the alternatives are not abstract possibilities but actual tunes in his inner ear. In writing a philosophical essay, only at the weakest points of your argument do you stop and weigh alternatives; all the best pieces of the work write themselves.

Inwagen sets himself the task of "discovering whether either of the two arguments [for the incompatibility and for the compatibility of freedom with determinism] is defective, and (if so) of locating the defect or defects." But encumbering himself with the tools of 'possibility' and 'choice' and accepting the 'scientific' presupposition that all natures must be subject to 'laws of nature', the task is, in the strictest sense, impossible of accomplishment. His experiment with the idea of "a world inhabited only by immaterial intelligences" does not help. "The dilemma", he says, "arises from the concept of metaphysical freedom itself, and its conclusion is that metaphysical freedom is a contradictory concept."

But he cannot rest in this conclusion, for "none of us really believes this". Where does that leave us? That reason tells us our free will is an illusion yet our feelings tell us it is a reality? In fact, Professor Inwagen ends his essay by candidly confessing: "I am certain that I cannot dispel the mystery, and I am certain that no one else has in fact done so." To my mind this is a necessary consequence of our failure to acknowledge the radical distinction between scientific thinking and philosophical thinking. Even Kant, who tentatively groped in that direction, did not go the whole way; only Socrates had the answer which we neglect to attend to, to our own detriment.

THOMAS NAGEL:

"FREEDOM AND THE VIEW FROM NOWHERE"

Nagel's distinction between the subjective and the objective (as defined by him) cannot be fundamental. He admits that "the distinction between more subjective and more objective views is really a matter of degree." It is really a question of wider or narrower fields of experience. This is other than the distinction between the phenomenal domain and the domain of subjective reality which I think is philosophically all-important. It is because modern philosophers refuse to, or stop short of, acknowledging that the realm of intelligible ideas is the realm of reality in contradistinction to the realm of transient existence that they find reality invariably slipping through their fingers every time they think they are on the point of getting hold of it. Even staunch believers in subjectivity, such as Nagel, think that if they cannot subject it to the terms of objectivity, then its reality is not ascertained. Actions viewed "from an objective or external standpoint" are seen "as part of the order of nature". Professor Nagel seems to see a problem in this. But if all action, all becoming, has sufficient reason, then, naturally, viewed from outside, the connectedness of its moments can only be seen under the form of causation. This is not a problem with freedom, but with us: we want to see spontaneous activity from outside and yet see it as it is inside!

Nagel considers the problem of freedom under the two aspects of autonomy and responsibility, and under both aspects finds it problematic. "We are apparently condemned to want something impossible." I will comment only on his treatment of autonomy, for what we have to say here applies to the problem in its totality. How does the problem arise? "In acting we occupy the internal perspective ... But when we ... consider our own actions and those of others simply as part of the course of events ... it begins to look as though we never really contribute anything." Unless we free ourselves from the empirical presumption that only the objective is real and realize that it is the subjective that is the whole of reality, the problem will remain with us.

More to the point, who are the 'we' who (seemingly) 'never really contribute'? Not only does it seem possible "that many of the alternatives that appear to lie open when viewed from an internal perspective would seem closed" but

“even if some of them are left open, given a complete specification of the condition of the agent and the circumstances of action, it is not clear how this would leave anything further for the agent to contribute to the outcome — anything that he could contribute as source, rather than merely as the scene of the outcome — the person whose act it is. If they are left open given everything about him, what does he have to do with the result?”

I have quoted this passage at some length because it affords an exemplary illustration of the quandaries that the analytical habit of mind creates for us. We begin by slicing ‘the agent’ off ‘the complete specification of the condition of the agent’, separating ‘the source’ from ‘the scene of the outcome’, isolating from the act ‘the person whose act it is’. We forget that only the whole is real: to think theoretically we are obliged to create distinctions within the whole, but when we forget that these distinctions are fictions, we fall into a maze of contradictions. The person is his circumstances, is his act, is the outcome, and ‘contributes’ to the outcome by letting the circumstances creatively unfold – I will not say ‘in her/his’, because it is rather s/he that unfolds – her/his inner reality through the circumstances.

Nagel finds Kant’s “idea of the noumenal self which is outside time and causality” unintelligible. It is unintelligible only if intelligibility is understood in terms of scientific explanation. The noumenal self (if you choose to use that label) is a mystery, but only in the sense that it cannot be explained in terms of anything other than itself; its self-evidence is its reality and has to be accepted as such.

Nagel is driven to seek “a kind of reconciliation between the objective standpoint and the inner perspective of agency”, but he has to admit that this “does not meet the central problem of free will”. In my view, the reconciliation he proposes abandons the metaphysical problem in an attempt to find comfort in psychological orientation.

Nagel speaks of “the objective self”. To me this is a contradiction in terms. To objectify the self is to negate its reality. In his deservedly famous Bat essay, Nagel fights against the abolition of the subjective, but it remains for

him an enigma, because he stops short of daringly affirming that it is the only reality we know. It is only when we audaciously affirm with Plato that the so-called 'reality' of the empirical Giants is a mere shadow, and that the only reality is the reality we know with immediacy in our own minds, that the enigma ceases to be enigmatic.

P. F. STRAWSON:  
"FREEDOM AND RESENTMENT"

P. F. Strawson, in a lecture which 'made a change in thinking' (Ted Honderich), stating that he belongs to "the party of those who do not know what the thesis of determinism is", concentrating on the question of responsibility, finding those who think responsibility compatible and those who think it incompatible with determinism at loggerheads, proposes to "move towards reconciliation". He does this by drawing attention to attitudes and reactions which we feel to be important and which may well be socially important. This is very good as far as it goes, but, to my mind, is all beside the point where the metaphysical problem of free will is concerned.

Strawson considers the question: "What effect would, or should, the acceptance of the truth of a general thesis of determinism have upon these reactive attitudes?" The conclusion he arrives at is that "our natural human commitment to ordinary inter-personal attitudes ... is part of the general framework of human life". So we had better forget about compatibility and incompatibility. I too happen to campaign for that proposal, but with a difference. I begin from the reality of free will, and then pose the metaphysical question: What are we to understand by 'free will'? But then, as we learn from Socrates, for all questions of the form 'What is X?', the final philosophical answer is 'X is X'. The end of all philosophical inquiry is to behold the reality in its own light.

GALEN STRAWSON:  
“FREE WILL”

Galen Strawson, in common with many other contemporary thinkers, makes the error of equating absence of causal determinism with chance. “Their [the libertarians’] great difficulty is to explain why the falsity of determinism is any better than determinism ... For suppose that not every event is determined, and that some events occur randomly, or as a matter of chance. How can this help with free will?” I have no need to repeat here what I have already said in dealing with this point.

But the position with which Professor Strawson is apparently in sympathy is that of the “less sanguine” incompatibilists who “conclude that we are not genuinely free agents or genuinely morally responsible, whether determinism is true or false. ... When one acts, one acts in the way one does because of the way one is. So to be truly morally responsible for one’s actions, one would have to be truly responsible for the way one is: one would have to be *causa sui* ... But nothing can be *causa sui* – nothing can be the ultimate cause of itself in any respect.”

Here I have three points to make, which I will put briefly because I have dealt with them sufficiently elsewhere. Firstly, to confound the problem of freedom with the problem of responsibility is to obliterate the metaphysical character of the problem. Secondly, I see no problem with the fact that I act the way I do because of the way I am; that, for me, is freedom: to act my character, to realize myself in action. Thirdly, to say that “nothing can be the ultimate cause of itself” is either simply false or a trite logical trick: ultimate reality – and all reality in so far as it has the character of reality – is its own ground and source; else there would be no being at all; but if we insist on intruding the fiction of cause where it has no right to be, then we fall into endless contradictions, as is clearly shown when Strawson expands his argument in section 3, under the rubric “Pessimism”.

Thus Strawson says that the “pessimists or no-freedom theorists”, among whom he obviously counts himself – apparently in opposition to his father’s

‘optimist conclusion’ –, “believe that free will, of the sort that is necessary for genuine moral responsibility, is provably impossible.”

I cannot understand why the concept of ‘moral agent’ should be tied to that of (moral) responsibility. I am a moral agent (or person, the term I prefer) when I act in fulfilment of ideals and values in the intelligible realm which constitutes my true being as a human.

If Strawson and others regard ‘self-origination’, as they derogatorily term it, as the downfall of free will, I see creativity as the very reality of free will. We do create ourselves in every spontaneous act. [It seems that the advocates of ‘origination’ have ensured the downfall of their doctrine when they made the ‘act of origination’ into a thing other than the spontaneous act itself. Like all theoretical fragmentations, it could not escape being riddled with contradictions. I am not defending any such approach or affiliating myself with it, and I have no use for the term ‘origination’. What I wish to say is that advocates of origination have a point, but go the wrong way about vindicating it.]

Strawson argues at length that even if I try to change the way I am, I am determined in that endeavour by elements in the way I am. Granted: I am not God. I know that, and I am happy the way I am. The whole argument, in my view, boils down to this: there is an impossible sense of free will which we can prove to be impossible. Is this serious philosophy?

Galen Strawson, like Ted Honderich, seems to reduce responsibility to a subjective feeling, yet his language is confusing. “One’s radical responsibility seems to stem simply from the fact that one is fully conscious of one’s situation, and knows that one can choose, and believes that one action is morally better than the other.” Responsibility stems from the awareness? What responsibility? One can choose? Isn’t that just what the question is about? One believes that one action is morally better? I believe that if you can say that, then you have already done away with the problem. To believe that one action is morally better is to bring into action (pardon the pun; it’s harmless) a transcendent reality, a new plane of being, the spiritual plane: and that is moral freedom.

Galen Strawson refuses to commit himself philosophically. His explicit

purpose is “to explain why the debate is likely to continue for as long as human beings can think.” But I think I have not done him wrong in my comments since he finds (1) powerful logical and metaphysical reasons on the side of denying free will, and (2) powerful psychological reasons on the side of belief in free will. The second point he apparently owes to P. F. Strawson’s attitudinal thesis. In his summation of ‘challenges to pessimism’ in sect. 6 it is quite obvious where his heart and mind lie.

CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR AND DANIEL DENNETT:  
“WHO’S AFRAID OF DETERMINISM? RETHINKING CAUSES AND  
POSSIBILITIES”

Can Analytical Philosophy contribute to the solution of the problem of Free Will? Professors Christopher Taylor and Daniel Dennett put their hands to it in “Who’s Afraid of Determinism? Rethinking Causes and Possibilities”. (*The Oxford Companion of Free Will*, edited by Professor Robert Kane. The paper is also accessible on Ted Hoderich’s Determinism and Freedom Philosophy Website, which I acknowledge as my source.) The explicit purpose of the authors is to argue that the fear that determinism jeopardizes free will is unjustified; their strategy is to show that even with determinism there is no dearth of possibilities.

Unfortunately, the possibilities turn out to be possibilities in ‘other worlds’ that cannot be actualized in our world. I do not think they succeed in advancing the discussion. In commenting on the paper at some length my purpose is not so much to examine its thesis as to show that the methods of Analytical Philosophy can make no significant contribution to philosophical thinking. I arrange my comments under the headings of the original paper to facilitate reference.

[Untitled introductory section]

Taylor and Dennett write, “Consider the case where I miss a very short putt

and kick myself because I could have holed it.” They deploy all the state-of-the-art weaponry of Analytical Philosophy to carry out an analysis of “I could have holed it”. I maintain that this can shed no light on the philosophical problem of free will. Such analyses can be very interesting language games or logical games, but in studying *what was not*, the authors are neither examining an empirical actuality nor looking into a meaningful idea: the analyses develop fanciful (the word is used in a neutral sense) scenarios that have no relation to what was or what is. But when I translate “I could have done it” into “Next time I have to be more careful”, this is a positive idea that will (provided I keep the resolve in mind) enter into the making of my next attempt, whatever the result. (The psychology of “I could have done it” differs from that of “I could have done otherwise” where alternative choices are involved, but what I say of the futility of theoretical analysis holds in any case.)

#### “POSSIBLE WORLDS”

Professors Taylor and Dennett proceed to untangle the complexities underlying our concepts of causation and possibility. To do so, it seems, we have to ... “pretend that space is Euclidean” ... “assume a Democritean view” ... “pretend that ... one can judge” whether a particular world “accords with natural law” — while confessedly “we do not yet know all the laws of nature” ... and then, with the magic of symbols and quantifiers and counterfactuals and possible worlds, out of these compounded pretensions and assumptions and confessed lack of knowledge, we are expected to reach conclusions that have significance for our world. I am a naïve idiot: I prefer to stick to the realities that people my mind, which give me an intelligible universe. But empiricism will sooner admit the existence (indeed the actual existence!) of Possible Worlds and Counterfactuals than acknowledge the simple reality of the mind.

Taylor and Dennett translate “Austin could have holed the putt” into the language of symbolic logic, which I need not reproduce, but which I will re-translate thus: There is a (formally) possible world in which ‘Austin holes the putt’ is true. Does this take us any farther than saying that we can



fantasize Austin holing the putt? Logical notation no doubt has very useful applications. But I deny it can have any value for philosophy.

### “COUNTERFACTUALS”

In my opinion, this section clearly shows that Taylor and Dennett are not in the least concerned with determinism or with such a mundane thing as freedom. They are concerned with the old eristic problem, How can negative statements have meaning?, or, to give it a new look, How can conditional or hypothetical statements have meaning? A problem which Plato long ago settled satisfactorily in the *Sophist*. Call me stupid, but to my mind, all the symbolic trickery displayed in this section is nothing but that, vacuous trickery with symbols that does not add an iota to what can be said in good plain English. Its sole purpose is to get around such dirty words as ‘not’ or ‘could’ or ‘if’ by using sterilized symbols and roundabout formulations.

### “CAUSATION “

Taylor and Dennett write, “Fundamental as it appears, the language of causation has stirred up interminable debate”. They “think a more realistic goal is simply to develop a formal analogue (or analogues) that helps us think more clearly about the world.” A formal analogue (or analogues) can help us handle the thoughts we have about the world less awkwardly. This is just what the symbols of arithmetic do so wonderfully. But such formal analogues will never give us any new thoughts or disclose anything that is not already in the thoughts with which we begin. What we need do to end the interminable debate about causation is to acknowledge that it is a useful fiction and no more.

Marginally, may I ask, what do we gain by speaking of “possible worlds” instead of simply saying: logically or thinkably the moon, say, may escape from the gravitational pull of the earth? Our astrophysicists can come up with a hundred scenarios to make that happen without having to posit the existence of non-existent impossible possible worlds – and, believe me, this last phrase is not a parody! Even miracles are thinkable; we need for them no “possible worlds” other than the worlds of our fantasy. The “possible

worlds” of our new-fangled ‘metaphysicians’ is of the stuff of media stunts.

#### “DETERMINISM AND POSSIBILITY (THESIS 1)”

So finally, it would appear, our authors are moving on to the brunt. “Now that we have some formal machinery in place, we can reconsider the spuriously ‘obvious’ fear that determinism reduces our possibilities.” How is the obvious fear shown to be spurious? We go back to ‘Austin holes the putt’. In a world identical to our world, what holds in our world holds. But that’s too narrow a choice. We may admit into our possible worlds “worlds that differ in a few imperceptibly microscopic ways” from our actual world, and that can make all the difference. Being an incorrigible idiot, I will still ask: What is that to me? If determinism is true in this petty world of ours, what do I care if in one of Leibniz’ infinite possible worlds I could have chosen to beat Bill Gates at his game instead of writing philosophy? If determinism is true in this one world we know, then the obvious fears for our freedom would not be spurious, and juggling with symbols and formal analogues can befog the issue but cannot do away with it. (I am not here taking part in Taylor’s and Dennett’s controversy with John Austin.)

So when Taylor and Dennett say, “From this it follows that the truth or falsity of determinism should not affect our belief that certain unrealized events were nevertheless ‘possible’ in an important everyday sense of the word”, I can only say that that ‘important everyday sense’ is none other than the purely logical sense of possible, where possible means not formally self-contradictory. Did anybody ever deny that? You cannot deny a definition, can you? But does that have any relevance to the ‘obvious fear’ that in a given strongly deterministic world – and a particular given world is what matters to us here and now – nothing is possible but what obtains? (To preclude misunderstanding, I reject that fear, but on other grounds, not by fantasizing possibilities.)

I think Taylor and Dennett argue against themselves in the “chess-playing computer programs” scenario they offer. I have to quote this passage at some length.

“Computers are marvels of determinism. Even their so-called random number generators only execute pseudo-random functions ... That means that computer programs that avail themselves of randomness at various ‘choice’ points will nevertheless spin out exactly the same sequence of states if run over and over again from a cold start. Suppose ... you install two different chess-playing programs ... and yoke them together with a little supervisory program ... if either chess program consults the random number generator during its calculations ... then in the following game the state of the random number generator will have changed ... and a variant game will blossom ... Nevertheless, if you turned off the computer, and then restarted it running the same program, exactly the same variegated series of games would spin out.”

Doesn't this amount to saying that determinism is deterministic after all: even with the smuggling in of the mischievous ‘if’ half-way through the story, we only have a different but equally deterministic world.

The development of the story in the following paragraphs does not make any significant change. Reverting to the story of the missed putt, the authors say, “Looking at precisely the same case, again and again, is utterly uninformative, but looking at similar cases is in fact diagnostic.” Very good advice, but this is not philosophy but pedagogy. Don't go on grumbling “I could have, I could have” but rather say “I should have prepared differently” or better still “In future I should prepare differently.” The authors tell us that if in “looking at similar cases” we interpret the similarity too liberally “we would be committing an error alluded to earlier, making X [the set of possible worlds] too large.” In the simple language of us simpletons, that would be a lot of day-dreaming. But we have already been told that by adopting too narrow a choice we would be stuck with our actual uninteresting world. “It is only if we ‘wiggle the events’ (as David Lewis has said), looking not at ‘conditions as they precisely were’ but at neighbouring worlds, that we achieve any understanding at all.” Again I say,

good advice for a golfer wanting to improve his record. But when the authors go on to say, “The burden rests with incompatibilists to explain why ‘real’ possibility demands a narrow choice of X – or why we should be interested in such a concept of possibility, regardless of its ‘reality’”, I must say this is either confused thinking or sheer sophistry. A narrow choice of X is demanded because here we are not playing logical games but are practically concerned with the practical problem of living in a world very narrowly chosen for us. Unless Taylor and Dennett and Lewis *et al.* find the means to transport us to their possible worlds, the only possibilities we are interested in are the possibilities permitted in this one actual world of ours.

When in the concluding paragraph of this section the authors say that “introducing indeterminism adds little in the way of worthwhile possibilities, opportunities, or competences to a universe”, they are obviously equating indeterminism with chance or the kind of determined computer randomness they alluded to earlier. If by indeterminism we mean simply the denial that strong determinism holds, then it is pointless to argue for or against this purely negative concept before we give it some coherent content.

#### “SOME RELATED FEARS “

I will only remark that ‘possibility’ in this section seems to be equated with the good old Aristotelean ‘potentiality’, anything that, given the normal run of things, will happen. Taylor and Dennett seem to argue against Honderich that, if I am pre-determined to be fortunate, then I have no cause to complain. But I do; I want my fortune to be my own doing. Then the authors say, “In general, there is no paradox in the observation that certain phenomena are determined to be changeable, chaotic, and unpredictable, an obvious and important fact that philosophers have curiously ignored.” Who said the ‘fact’ was ignored? Isn’t this the idea of God creating a pre-determined world with room for free will and miracles? And isn’t this to eat one’s cake and have it? But I am eager to move on to the next section where the authors promise to show that “creativity, the ability to author something of ‘originate value’ is similarly independent of determinism.” I am eager, because I am an advocate of creativity, but I go there by a completely

different route.

## “DETERMINISM AND CAUSATION (THESIS 2)”

Taylor and Dennett suspect that the fear “that determinism would eliminate some worthwhile type of causation from the universe ... stems from the conflation of causal necessity with causal sufficiency”. They then go on to explain what they understand by determinism in contradistinction to causation, an understanding which, I suspect, not many share with them, not out of failure to understand, but because they chose to use the terms differently, which is their incontestable right as long as they make clear in what sense they are using the terms.

The authors state that (omitting the symbols) “according to determinism, the precise condition of the universe one second after the big bang ... causally sufficed to produce the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963.” Then we are told that that precise condition of the universe, though sufficient, is hardly necessary, for “Kennedy might well have been assassinated anyway, even if some different conditions had obtained back during the universe’s birth.” Again the question is not whether in a fantasized possible world Kennedy might or might not have been killed, but whether in this actual world of ours Laplace’s contention that at one second after the big bang Kennedy’s assassination was predictable is true or not. (Pardon the seeming anachronism.) To say that in a slightly different world a different outcome would have obtained is to evade the issue. We know that Shakespeare’s Cleopatra and Shaw’s Cleopatra fared differently because they inhabited different worlds, but that has no relevance to the question whether the fate of the flesh-and-blood Cleopatra that lived in Egypt in the first century B.C. was predetermined or not.

“In fact, determinism is perfectly compatible with the notion that some events have no cause at all.” Beautiful! And these are the people who want to teach us the virtues of clear thinking! What instance do they give of an event that has “no cause at all”? The statement “The devaluation of the rupiah caused the Dow Jones average to fall.” The economist or the economic correspondent of the network that makes that announcement

would readily confess it to be a loose, inaccurate statement, and that what caused the Dow Jones average to fall was not one factor but a complex combination of factors. Again, it is one thing to admonish us to be more careful with our attribution of causes and quite another thing to draw metaphysical conclusions from our (not their!) careless habits of speech.

Then we are told about the man “falling down an elevator shaft” and about worlds in which he survives. That’s consolation enough for the poor man’s widow! My two-year-old granddaughter plays at cooking, takes a helping on her toy plate, ‘eats’ with her toy spoon and toy fork, but when she feels hungry she goes to Mom to ask for food. She distinguishes very clearly between the world of fantasy and the actual world. Would that our present-day philosophers could do that!

“In closing, let us return to the human desire pinpointed by Kane ... the desire to be able to take full credit as the creators and causes of change in the world. ... The thirst for originality and causal relevance is not to be quenched by abstruse quantum events: all that we require is the knowledge that without our presence, the universe would have turned out significantly different.”

That says nothing about determinism and owes nothing to all the talk about possible worlds. In fact this position agrees with that of those philosophers who hold either that determinism is true or that it may be true but that in any case what matters to us is that we have this internal feeling of being free. I sympathize with that but I go further: I maintain that determinism is a working scientific hypothesis that has no place in metaphysics; that we have autonomy in a significant sense, and that we have creativity in a significant sense.

The most generous interpretation I can put on Professors Taylor’s and Dennett’s treatment of the question is that they are so engrossed in their formally possible worlds that they easily confuse them with this insignificant actual world of ours.

TED HONDERICH:

“DETERMINISM AS TRUE, COMPATIBILISM AND  
INCOMPATIBILISM AS BOTH FALSE, AND THE REAL PROBLEM”

Ted Honderich begins by defining ‘event’ and ‘what is required for an event to be an explanation’. He lays down the protocol for the language he intends to use. The conclusions he will draw will be true in/for that language, that is, true within the universe of discourse created by that language. That is so, I maintain, for all philosophy and for all scientific theory. Will those formally valid conclusions have a binding force on nature? Will they be binding for me if I choose to use a different language? My answer is a decided No. That is why I assert the futility of all argumentation. Philosophy is not concerned with the establishment of the truth or falsehood of any propositions, but with the creation of meaningful universes of discourse under which the givennesses of the phenomenal world and of experience obtain intelligibility.

Professor Honderich affirms that “no general proposition of interest has greater inductive and empirical support than that all events whatever, including the choices or decisions and the like, have explanations.” I will only make three marginal remarks in passing: (1) “inductive and empirical support” does not take us far; (2) “choices or decisions and the like” are smuggled in without justification; (3) what we mean by events having “explanations” is just what the whole question is about. If “events have explanations” is taken to mean that events satisfy the requirement of rationality, that is fully consistent with the claim of free will. Only when “explanations” are understood as implying predetermination is there a problem.

Honderich argues with obvious heat against Quantum Theory and affirms that quantum events “are theoretical entities in a special sense of that term, not events.” Is not all scientific theory in the same predicament? Scientists of the first calibre were quite happy to work with ether, with gravitation, with

indivisible atoms, with infinite space, and in our own day with black holes and white holes. (I am not a scientist or historian of science, else I could have given more telling examples.)

Honderich enlists the support of the Philosophy of Mind or, more accurately, the philosophers of mind. He tells us that “in the Philosophy of Mind ... there is nothing at all about what ... is the unique fact of our consciousness and mental activity and so on.” Quite naturally. Philosophy of Mind was instituted as a study of the mind as object; the mind as object is a phenomenal process, that is, phenomena conjoined in the mind of the researcher in the form of causal chains. Philosophers of mind use the mind in their studies, but they never study the mind; they study a shadow of the mind. This is something I have been harping on so often that I do not want to go further into it here: see *Let Us Philosophize*, “Science and the Mind”, “Subjectivism and Solipsism”, “”, “Our Need for Spirituality”, etc.

TED HONDERICH:  
“HOW FREE ARE YOU”

If I understand Professor Honderich correctly, his position may be outlined as follows: (1) there are grounds for accepting determinism as true; (2) there are cogent arguments against Compatibilism; (3) there are cogent arguments against Incompatibilism. To escape the dilemma, Honderich offers his doctrine of Attitudinism: we are to inquire into what attitudes towards our own behaviour and the behaviour of others follow from our acceptance or rejection of determinism. Does this amount to saying that our philosophical convictions should be decided by a pragmatic criterion? I am not quite sure that I truly understand Honderich’s position. Although it would seem that the two of us are on common ground in waiving the Compatibilism *versus* Incompatibilism controversy as irrelevant to the philosophical problem of free will, my reasons are different from his. I maintain that causal determinism is a scientific postulate which, in common with all objective science, does not yield philosophical truth or philosophical understanding, and hence the question of the compatibility or incompatibility of the



postulate with the philosophical idea of free will does not arise in the first place. (See “Knowledge and Understanding” and *Plato: An Interpretation*, ch. 6, “Knowledge and Reality”.)

Honderich says you can reflect about your past life and “fall into no uncertainty whatever about the proposition that everything that happened did have an explanation in the ordinary and indeed the only real sense. That is, it was an ordinary effect.” Honderich’s “ordinary sense” is decidedly not the “only real sense” of explanation. Permit me to designate this the empirical presumption – namely, that to ‘explain’ can only mean to give an account in terms of the fictions of cause and effect – and to add that it is a presumption that I find no reason to accept. Let us not haggle about a word; what the neurons in my brain do may, in a certain usage, be said to ‘explain’ my behaviour, but I contend that it can never make me understand that behaviour: the only way to understand my or someone else’s behaviour is to consider the ideals, goals, dreams, values, that were behind that behaviour — and I will not try to refine on the metaphor in ‘behind’, because all refinement will necessarily be in terms of additional metaphors, and all metaphor, all determinate speech, will necessarily be found wanting.

Honderich seems to reach out towards the hope that “the true resolution of the problem” may be found “in metaphysics and epistemology, these being understood as philosophical concerns with the nature of reality and our part in it and our role in it.” In pursuit of this hope, Honderich advances his doctrine of Perceptual Consciousness as Existence. In my opinion, this could have been developed into a major system on the grand scale. As Honderich himself says, it is “no longer English philosophy ... It is high reasoning or deep thinking, assigned earlier to French and German philosophy.” Could have been developed, I say, except that Honderich remains too English to escape the empirical outlook and throw off the shackles of the presuppositions of scientific thinking. A fundamental metaphysical approach is only possible when we realize the radical distinction between scientific and philosophical thinking.

## PART FOUR

### CONCLUSION

Plato spoke of the endless battle between the Gods who find reality in the mind and the Giants who find reality in the perceptible world (*Sophist*, 245e-246e). Around the seventeenth century Europe had a re-birth, and, with the eyes of a new-born babe, was all taken up by the surrounding world. Even the Rationalists, who were all for subjecting everything to reason, were too busy exploring the outer world with their minds to pay much attention to the inner reality of those minds. The Empiricists completed the banishment of the mind, and it was only natural that Dr Johnson should refute Bishop Berkeley with his foot. Kant came to the rescue and reinstated the reality of God, the soul, and the free will in the inner citadel of Practical Reason. But the world-oriented habit of mind was too strong. It was felt that unless those realities could be objectified and re-discovered in the outer world, their reality would be compromised. That is the root of the problem.

For a solution to the problem we have to go back to the teaching of Plato: What we find in the mind is the whole of reality; what is outside the mind is a mere shadow, and all 'knowledge' relating to the shadows of the phenomenal world is, strictly speaking, opinion and conjecture. Our minds, our will, our purposive activity are the reality we know directly, immediately, self-evidently. Turning our eyes away from this reality to the outer world, we are inevitably engrossed in all the interminable quandaries that have kept and are keeping philosophers fruitlessly busy.

But Plato's articulation of his ideal world leaves something to be desired. We are likely to be left with too static an impression of the intelligible Forms. Yet the reality we know in ourselves is not static; it is creative. It is in creativity that we find freedom. And creativity is a reality we know in ourselves, as immediately and self-evidently as we know the reality of our minds. If the hypotheses of our objective sciences find it difficult to accommodate the idea of creativity, so much the worse for those hypotheses.

That only shows they are too narrow, too shallow: in their defence it has to be said that they have to be narrow and shallow if they are to serve their purpose. But that is no reason why we should belie the inner self-evidence of our moral and creative experience.

Free will is the autonomous affirmation of the reality of intelligent being in creative activity. An act of love is spontaneous, free, and creative. An act of artistic creation is spontaneous, free, and creative. The antecedents of the act are sufficient to the intelligibility of the outcome, but the outcome was not contained in them; the act brings into the world something new. My creative intelligence is my reality, my freedom, my dignity, my whole worth. This is not a proposition that has to be proved: this is a vision that has to be lived, and when lived shines in the self-evidence of its reality. If we find this difficult to believe or even to conceive, it is only because we have lost the innocence of the inward vision.

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# KANT AND PLATO

## PREFATORY

I have often before represented Kant's position as a re-discovery or re-affirmation of an insight that we owe in the first place to Socrates, preserved for us in the works of Plato, though Kant failed to regain the full fruition of the Socratic-Platonic insight. That insight, not only as fully developed by Plato, but even in the partial recovery achieved by Kant, has remained lost to us.

Hume, taking to its logical conclusion Locke's empiricism, in which the mind was a void receptacle, had shown that, if we took Locke's assumptions more consistently than Locke himself did, we could have no secure knowledge. All judgment would be either tautologous or strictly contingent. Kant, in seeking to rescue the possibility of scientific knowledge, found that we have to acknowledge the active participation of the mind in knowledge, that what he termed synthetic *a priori* judgments rest on forms, concepts, and principles that have no source other than the mind. In so doing, Kant moved in the direction of the Socratic-Platonic conception of the mind as the ground and source of all knowledge and all understanding.

When I tried to follow in detail the points where the *Critique of Pure Reason* met with Plato's position, I found that I had to highlight the differences more than the points of agreement. Possibly I had earlier read more of Plato into Kant than Kant would have acknowledged. In this paper I mean to suggest that, while there is a considerable measure of convergence

in the positions of two of the acutest minds that ever engaged in philosophical thinking, yet Plato opens up for us vistas of thought that Kant did not envisage.

Kant formulates the ‘general problem (*Aufgabe*) of pure reason’ thus: How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible? I think that the answer given to the question in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the answer that may be garnered from Plato’s dialogues constitute two distinct universes of discourse that nevertheless reflect the same insight — and as a Platonist I may be permitted to say that the insight in Plato is deeper and less encumbered with non-essential adjuncts: for Kant had Aristotle’s fondness for technicalities, firm definitions, and complex theoretical structures; ‘architectonic’ was a term dear to Kant’s heart.

All quotations below from the *Critique of Pure Reason* are from the translation by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood.[i] Figures preceded by the letter A and/or B refer to page numbers in the first and/or second editions, followed by page number in Guyer’s and Wood’s translation. Quotations from the *Critique of Judgment* are from the translation by Werner S. Pluhar [ii] and give the *Akademie* edition page number followed by the page number in Pluhar’s translation.

## AN OUTLINE OF SOCRATES’ POSITION

Whatever may be due to Plato of the philosophy we find in the dialogues, I think we can with confidence attribute to Socrates (1) the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible; and (2) the radical separation of knowledge relating to the natural world from the understanding that the philosopher seeks. Socrates was primarily concerned with moral ideas and values. In his tireless examination of his fellow-citizens, which was at the same time, as he insisted, an examination of his own mind and soul, he sought to clarify those ideas and values, illuminate them, disentangle them, and free them from foreign accretions. This is what Aristotle misrepresented as a search for definitions. In Socrates’ elenctic discourses all proposed definitions are rejected as unsatisfactory. The negative outcome with the

resulting *aporia* was not accidental. It was not the purpose of Socrates to reach a formal or working definition but to free his interlocutors' minds of confused notions and presuppositions and help them towards a better understanding of themselves.[iii] Later in life Plato may have experimented with methods of classification, of collection and division, as he experimented with hypothetical reasoning, to reach working definitions and sustainable propositions. That was not a substitute for the Socratic elenctic; it was a diversion in response to the branching interests of the Academy.

Socrates knew that the moral ideas in virtue of which alone we are human, which alone give meaning and value to human life, have no source other than the mind. They constitute an intelligible realm fully independent of the sensible world. The instances of justice, reasonableness, courage, that we find in the outside world are only seen as such, adjudged as such, in the light of the ideas. Socrates may have remained solely concerned with moral ideas, but Plato saw that not only are the moral concepts together with the notions of mathematical equality and number purely intelligible but that all things of the sensible world only have meaning for us in virtue of the intelligible forms engendered in the mind. Perhaps this is what Plato meant to point out when he made Parmenides, in the dialogue named after him, tell young Socrates that when philosophy has taken hold of him he will not think hair or mud or dirt unworthy of being illumined by intelligible forms.[iv]

In the *Phaedo* Plato makes Socrates give an autobiographical account,[v] the main lesson of which has not yet, I believe, been appropriated by students of philosophy. Socrates says that early in life he renounced inquiry into physical causes when he realized that the study of the outside world does not yield answers to the questions that concerned him. He draws a clear line between the kind of knowledge that can be obtained from a study of the outer world and the understanding[vi] that can only come from reflection by the mind on the ideas proper to the mind. The first, we may say, is the region of science and gives knowledge of the phenomenal world, and the second the region of philosophy and gives insight into the ideals and values by virtue of which humans are human. The scientist's description of Socrates' bones and sinews and neurons tells us how he sits crouched on his prison bed but only Socrates' ideal of obedience to the law makes us understand

why he chooses to remain in prison awaiting execution rather than seeking safety elsewhere. This is a corollary of the distinction between the intelligible realm and the sensible realm. The questions raised by physical investigation are distinct from those raised by philosophical inquiry, and the answers reached in the one area irrelevant to the other.[vii] Kant also saw this and the whole of his critical system affirmed it and yet philosophers, scientists, and theologians have equally failed to heed the lesson.

## AN OUTLINE OF PLATO'S POSITION ON KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY

The Socratic radical distinction between the intelligible and the sensible realms remained the basis of Plato's philosophical outlook.[viii] For Plato, the intelligible realm was the realm of reality. He equated *ousia*, *to on*, *alêtheia* with the intelligible. The sensible world, the whole of the natural world with its phenomenal manifestations, ceaselessly changing and shot through and through with relativity, could not be but a world of shadows. This is the message of the famous Allegory of the Cave. In the *Phaedo* we are told that when we try to acquire knowledge through the bodily senses, the mind is dragged by the body into the realm of the changeable, and loses its way and becomes confused, but when it investigates by itself, it passes into the realm of what is pure.[ix]

In the *Republic* Plato gives an account of the philosophic ascent from the mutability and relativity of the sensible world to the contemplation of what is real in the realm of pure ideas. Then he represents the levels of knowledge possible to human beings in the graphic image of the Divided Line. Briefly, we have different levels of knowledge on two planes, that of the real and intelligible on the one hand, and that of the phenomenal, less real and less knowable, on the other hand. The divisions of the line representing these two levels are further each divided into two sections. In the lower section of the lower division we have images or illusions, and in the higher section we can have perceptions and opinions. On the intelligible plane, employing forms, we can have scientific knowledge of perceptible things on the lower level,



and we can have a purer form of knowledge concerned with first principles on the higher level.

But for Plato that highest knowledge concerned with first principles, which is philosophy proper, cannot aspire to the possession of absolute or final truth. The intelligible realm is the realm of reality and we learn in the *Republic* that the apex and crown of that realm is the Form of the Good. That is the highest reality that philosophical thinking can lead to. But Socrates in the *Republic* cannot give an account of the Form of the Good. He can only give a simile. The Good is to mind and the intelligible as the sun is to sight and the visible. It is the cause of knowledge and truth but is beyond the reach of knowledge and truth. Thus just as the only outcome of the Socratic elenctic examination is to lead us to look within our mind, so for Plato all search for reality leads us back – not to mind as an abstract concept – but to the activity of the mind, the exercise of intelligence, as the only reality we know. Yet all representation of philosophical insight in determinate conceptual formulations must necessarily be imperfect. If we rest content with it, if we accept it as final, it turns into falsehood. Thus in the *Phaedrus*[x] and in the Seventh Letter[xi] we are told in the plainest terms that the profoundest insights cannot be expressed in a fixed formula of words. Therefore all philosophical formulations must be subjected to dialectical criticism which bares and destroys their conceptual presuppositions.[xii] This is the only way for the mind to remain alive.

## AN ABSTRACT OF KANT'S CRITICAL SYSTEM

In this essay I will not examine the argument of Kant's *Critique* or subject his highly intricate analyses and deductions to criticism: all of these are accidental accretions to what is essential in Kant. I will not be so heartless as to echo Nietzsche's lambasting of the "tartuffery, as stiff as it is virtuous, of old Kant as he lures us along the dialectical bypaths which lead, more correctly, mislead, to his 'categorical imperative' ..." [xiii], but I will say that Kant's laborious analyses and rigorous deductions do more to obscure his essential insights than to clarify them. Every philosopher arrives at (or

adopts from another) his ‘conclusions’ first and then works out arguments to support them. No philosopher worth his salt has ever reached his most important positions by reasoning from neutral premisses.

The legend of Kant’s overnight awakening from his dogmatic slumber thanks to Hume, which was initiated by Kant himself in the Introduction to *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, can be misleading. It is important to be clear about what Kant meant in speaking of his ‘dogmatic slumber’. Kant had his early schooling in philosophy at the hands of the Rationalists. He was influenced by Leibniz and Wolff who, in common with Descartes, believed that the world could be known *a priori* through analysis of ideas and logical deduction. It is this reliance on pure ideas for yielding knowledge of the outside world that Kant came, under the shock of Humean scepticism, to reject and to dub ‘dogmatic’. But he did not forgo his conviction in the active role of the mind. In place of Descartes’s innate ideas, he introduced transcendental forms, transcendental categories, and Ideas of pure reason. His inaugural dissertation was entitled “On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World”. That was in 1770, eleven years before publication of the first *Critique* in 1781. No doubt the insight that “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind”[xiv] was then nascent in his mind even if not explicitly formulated yet.

Locke and Hume discounted the activity of the mind in their accounts of human understanding. Even Berkeley, for whom phenomenal things could only be for a mind, did not lay stress on the activity of the human mind and had to seek security for the being of the phenomenal in the mind of God. Kant had to remind us that without the activity of the human mind there can be no science, no knowledge, no understanding. Thus the first step towards achieving the double-goal of, on the one hand, getting rid of dogmatism, and, on the other hand, escaping Humean scepticism, was to reject Locke’s *tabula rasa* which Hume had accepted without question. Hence Kant sets on erecting the magnificent edifice of his critical system by proposing that human cognition has two sources, sensibility and the understanding: through sensibility we are presented with objects, but it is through the understanding that we think these objects.[xv] He finds that time and space, which Newton

regarded as objective entities containing things, are forms contributed by the mind, and asserts that even sensible perception is only possible through synthesis under the categories of the understanding, so that “the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience, and are thus also valid *a priori* of all objects of experience.”[xvi] The human mind is active and contributes to knowledge at all levels, from simple perception to the highest levels of theoretical thinking. In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique* Kant says that whoever first demonstrated a geometrical proposition found that “in order to know something securely *a priori* he had to ascribe to the thing nothing except what followed necessarily from what he himself had put into it in accordance with its concept.”[xvii] The revolution brought about in the study of nature was due to “the inspiration that what reason ... has to learn from nature, it has to seek in the latter ... in accordance with what reason itself puts into nature.”[xviii]

In the first edition of the *Critique* Kant underlined in bold terms the role of the mind in actively forming our knowledge of the natural world: It is our own mind that confers on appearances the order and regularity through which the chaotic presentations of our experience are turned into what we call nature.[xix] Thus the understanding, strictly speaking, legislates for nature, so that “without understanding there would not be any nature at all ..”[xx] In so far as human experience is concerned “the understanding is itself the source of the laws of nature.”[xxi] Kant found it necessary to re-write this whole section in the second edition. It was so shocking for both the rationalist and the empiricist frames of mind.

The empiricist position maintains that true statements are of two kinds only. They are either (a) empirical statements verifiable by observation and experiment or (b) analytical statements. Apart from these there are no true statements. To save mathematical propositions which were too important, practically, to be dumped, empiricists considered them to be analytical. Kant re-classified statements into three kinds. He went along with the empiricists in admitting analytical statements (which are only useful for clarification but do not add to our knowledge) and empirically verifiable statements which Kant termed synthetic *a posteriori* statements. In addition to these he maintained that there are synthetic *a priori* statements. He found the prime

example of such statements in mathematical propositions, which the empiricists had considered as analytical. Kant, agreeing with Plato (whether consciously or unconsciously) said that  $5 + 7 = 12$  is not analytical but synthetic. This led him to raise the question how such synthetic *a priori* statements are possible. The answer he found was that the mind contributes forms, concepts, and principles that join distinct elements synthetically. Not only does the mind join 5 and 7 in the original form 12; the mind also joins an antecedent and a consequent event – which Hume saw as succeeding each other without any necessary connection – under the form of causality, which decrees that the cause must be followed by its effect and that the effect must have had a cause.

This was the substance of what Kant announced as his ‘Copernican revolution’. While earlier it had been assumed by thinkers that “all our cognition must conform to objects”, he suggested that we “try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition.”[xxii] But this is nothing but the Platonic principle that all knowledge – including empirical knowledge down to simple sensible perception – rests on ideas born in the mind. Here we have the same insight: that all things are only intelligible in virtue of the forms engendered in and by the mind; that concepts of relationship, identity, causation, etc., are not found in the natural world; they are contributed by the mind.

The first foundation of Kant’s epistemology, then, is the distinction between the sensibility and the understanding. The sensibility receives its content from the natural world, but this content only yields knowledge when subjected to the forms of the understanding, which forms do not come from the outside world but are provided by the mind. But the knowledge we thus obtain of the world is knowledge of the world as it appears to us under the garb supplied by our own mind. The concepts of the understanding, for all their vital importance, can only give us knowledge of objects in space and time, which are themselves not objective but are modes of our sensibility or, in Kant’s terminology, forms of intuition. It follows that “everything that the understanding draws out of itself, without borrowing it from experience, it nevertheless has solely for the sake of use in experience.”[xxiii] The

understanding with its concepts and categories must be kept apart from the pure transcendental ideas of reason. We err when we try to apply the concepts and categories of the understanding – time, space, causality – to the final ground of things or the ultimate origin of things, which are beyond the range of all possible experience.

We need not at this point busy ourselves with the Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena. What is of consequence, under these conditions, is that all we can know *a priori* (= independently of experience, = by pure reason) is of the world as it may present itself to us under the forms of the understanding. This is the limit of our knowledge of the natural world: we know the immediate presentations of our experience and we can make judgment of possible presentations of our experience. Thus Kant heads section 22 of the second-edition version of the ‘transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding’ with the rubric: “The category has no other use for the cognition of things than its application to objects of experience”[xxiv] and opens the following section with the words: “The above proposition is of the greatest importance, for it determines the boundaries of the use of the pure concepts of the understanding in regard to objects.”[xxv]

In the Transcendental Dialectic[xxvi] Kant sets out to clear away the illusions of dogmatic metaphysics and theology. Thus in the extensive and laboriously argued Antinomy of Pure Reason Kant shows that, taking the concepts of the understanding (the mathematical notions and the principle of causality) – which serve us so well in dealing with the phenomena of nature – and employing them as abstract concepts without experiential content, we can build up logically valid inferential sequences yielding mutually contradictory propositions. He thus shows that the traditionally conflicting theological and metaphysical positions relating to the fundamental nature and ultimate cause of things that had been hotly debated for millennia could all be plausibly proved and disproved at the same time. What we must conclude from this is that these theological and metaphysical questions can neither be settled by the methods of empirical science, being beyond the scope of experience, nor by the procedures of pure reason.

As opposed to the concepts of the understanding, the concepts of reason, which Kant calls transcendental ideas, are concepts “to which no congruent object can be given in the senses.”[xxvii] While the concepts of the understanding bring about the synthetic unity of representations, the transcendental ideas of pure reason produce “the unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions in general.”[xxviii] Kant brings all transcendental ideas under three classes: (a) the absolute (unconditioned) unity of the thinking subject, (b) the absolute unity of the series of conditions of appearances, (c) the absolute unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general.[xxix] These translate into: (a) the idea of the self, (b) the idea of the world, and (c) the idea of the ultimate ground and origin of all being, or, using Platonic terms, into: (a) *psychê*, (b) *phusis*, (c) *to on*. These transcendental ideas, according to Kant, have no application in experience and are thus of no theoretical utility. On the plane of theoretical thought, our only gain in being aware of them would be the negative (yet very important) one of avoiding the error of drawing from them judgments relating to the phenomenal world. However, Kant found employment for them in the postulates of practical reason: of this I will have more to say in what follows.

The end-result of all of Kant’s Herculean endeavours – and his system is truly an edifice that only a Hercules of Thought could have erected – was to re-state in more complex terms what Plato had already said: All that we know of the objective world, of the world of nature, we only know by means of and in the light of ideas engendered in and by the mind; that the mind-generated ideas that transform for us the world of shadows into an intelligible realm relate only to that actual world of shadows. Kant takes us on an exhilarating journey through the realms of the mind, but in the end, to me at any rate, adds nothing to what I find in Plato’s *Republic* – and I find Plato’s account simpler, profounder, more inspiring, and less open to contradiction.

Kant expected his *Critique of Pure Reason* to bring about a complete change of thinking. His expectation was not unreasonable, and yet, even now, more than two hundred years after publication of the *Critique*, it is far from fulfilled. Despite the massive scholarly work done on Kant’s philosophy, philosophers are in as deep a ‘dogmatic slumber’ as before Kant

completed the structure for which Hume had levelled the ground. The lesson has not been learnt: theologians and scientists on different sides and in opposite directions glibly and in all confidence believe themselves able to determine what is beyond experience by the use of pure reason. Not only do we find theologians arguing about God and immortality but we also find scientists seriously seeking to discover the ultimate origin of the world, an origin which, if in time, can never be the origin but must always have something preceding it as its ground and origin, and if outside time, cannot be subject to empirical criteria and empirical methodology and consequently does not lie within the scope of objective knowledge. They fail to see that all of human knowledge is comprehended exhaustively in two spheres: on the one hand we have factual information about phenomenal presentations and on the other hand we have awareness of the living, creative, inner reality of the mind. The one sphere is that of science which teaches us the what and the how but never the why of things, and the other sphere is that of poetry and art and philosophy in which our spiritual essence affirms its reality in living its own creativity.

Kant hoped to make of metaphysics a ‘secure science’, and indeed thought he did. That was the error that obscured his great insight — the insight that should have put philosophy on the true path. Science and theology together had conspired to bury the Socratic insight under heaps of brilliant knowledge and mountains of dazzling theoretical speculation. That went on for some twenty-two centuries. Then came Kant and after much knocking about he saw what Socrates had seen. But he constructed around the vital insight a massive edifice of analyses and deductions and architectonics, and scholars busied themselves studying the majestic surrounding structure – Kant’s cherished science –, admiring it or finding fault with its details, and both admirers and fault-finders lost sight of the treasure that lay hid within.

## CRITICISM OF CERTAIN ASPECTS OF KANT’S CRITICAL SYSTEM

Kant seeks to deduce the *a priori* grounds for the possibility of experience. If we do not start from the self-evidence of intelligent experience as the

ground of all understanding and all knowledge, we keep vainly going round and round in our epistemological and psychological theorizing. But if we start from the activity of the mind as a self-evident reality, then no argument and no proof are needed. By arguing for this, by advancing proofs for this, Kant was turning the mind into an objective, observable, analyzable thing, and was thus equally with the empiricists, opening the door for reductionists to throw the reality of the mind behind their backs. To my mind, the totality of our experience is what we know. The immediacy of intelligible living experience is the starting point, the springboard, for all thought.

After representing space and time as forms of intuition, Kant goes on, in the *Analytic of Concepts*, to argue that there are *a priori* categories that we apply to the natural world. Kant ‘deduces’ the complete set of these categories, arranging them in four groups, each containing three categories, making a total of twelve fixed categories.[xxx] Kant created for himself and for others unnecessary difficulties by limiting the contribution of the mind to fixed forms of intuition and fixed categories. Despite his sophisticated deductions and proofs, there is no necessity and no finality attaching to Kant’s Categories any more than to Aristotle’s, which Kant criticizes. Both thinkers overlooked that their sets of categories were merely a convenient classification of the kinds of concepts, as good as but no better than the grammatical classification of the ‘parts of speech’. That Kant’s categories were metaphysical while Aristotle’s were logical is beside the point. Both great thinkers were seduced by their fondness for the neat and finished.

All of Kant’s transcendental arguments, all of his elaborate analyses and deductions, can be replaced by a descriptive account of a world-view and a special universe of discourse that can exist side by side with other world-views and universes of discourse. Witness how radically distinct cultures embody concepts that are strictly untranslatable into each other. Even languages which are not widely different from each other contain concepts which cannot be translated into each other without some distortion. Every language is a special universe of discourse through which speakers of that language live out their special life as human beings.



In his ‘refutation of material idealism’, Kant offers to prove the existence of objects in space outside us. The proof runs as follows: I am conscious of my existence as determined in time, which presupposes something persistent in perception; but this cannot be something in me, since my own existence in time can only be determined through this persistent thing. “Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself.”[xxxix] As a proof this is dubious; it is much better to present this as a creative idea. What I am aware of, what a new-born baby is aware of, what a pup is aware of, is the experiential continuum. By dividing this continuum into self and other than self, I become a person surrounded by an external world; the baby becomes a person surrounded by an external world; the pup may perhaps never achieve that separation and thus may conceivably remain an undistinguished part of the continuum.

Kant says that inner sense “by means of which the mind intuitively itself, or its inner state, gives ... no intuition of the soul itself, as an object.”[xxxix] No wonder Kant finds a difficulty in the question “how a subject can internally intuit itself”. This is a difficulty in which Kant needlessly entangles himself. He speaks of the consciousness of the self in the representation ‘I’ and asserts that it is no intuition but only an intellectual representation of “the self-activity of a thinking subject.”[xl] Since he chooses to speak of ‘the representation I’, then naturally to call that an intuition would be a contradiction in terms. But by refusing to break through the merely intellectual representation to the reality of the “self-activity of a thinking subject”, he renders himself powerless to extricate himself from the difficulty. He finds that inner sense “presents even ourselves to consciousness only as we appear to ourselves, not as we are in ourselves, since we intuit ourselves only as we are internally affected, which seems to be contradictory, since we would have to relate to ourselves passively.”[xli] What a maze of confusion! What a Gordian knot! But the knot can be broken at one blow by simply saying that our inner sense is ourselves. Kant continues the lines I quoted above to say that the difficulty he indicated is the reason why systems of psychology treat inner sense as the same as the faculty of apperception which, he reminds us, he carefully

distinguishes. He does not see that it is by making too much of this distinction between apperception and inner sense that he creates difficulties for his system. On the one hand inner sense presents ourselves to ourselves “as we appear to ourselves, not as we are in ourselves”, and on the other hand apperception, to which Kant seemingly assigns a crucial position in his system, becomes a mere conceptual construct.

The transcendental unity of apperception, had not Kant thus rendered it sapless and lifeless, would be the most important notion, the most fundamental principle in Kant’s philosophy, being the final condition of the possibility of experience. But this is not something to be deduced or proved. It is Kant’s attempt to deduce or to prove this that lays his system open to criticism and obscures the great insight at the heart of his philosophy. The transcendental unity of apperception – that frightful mouthful – is simply the reality of the mind, is the *nous*, the *phronêsis*, which, for Plato, is the primal self-evident reality, the reality from which all knowledge springs, in which all awareness is grounded. Unless we start from the reality of the mind, of the transcendental unity of apperception, we cannot escape Hume’s destruction of rational knowledge, and cannot find any meaning in the world.

Our philosophers of mind and philosophizing neuroscientists, accepting with Kant that what he calls apperception cannot be an object, and, with him, failing to see that it is just because it is our inner reality that it cannot be objectified, end by turning it into a negligible epiphenomenon, a species of mental gossamer. This inner sense by which the mind ‘intuits itself’, is the only reality known to us immediately, transcending all the transient phenomenal givennesses, and it can never be given as an object, since subjectivity is its essence. This is the reality that empiricists and reductionists deny us; it is the reality that baffles all their efforts to represent the mind as something observable and measurable. This is the reality in which Socrates and Plato saw our distinctive character and our whole worth as human beings.

There are those who tell us that it is our neurons that determine our thinking, our behaviour, our will. With the advancement of research we will

no doubt continue to find more and more concomitant incidences of brain states on the one hand and expressed thought and performed action on the other hand. But, I venture to assert, we will never understand how brain states produce thought and action. Well, nevertheless, let us say that I am my brain; I will not here make a bone of contention even of that. It is enough for me if we find that the act of thinking is what is real. But thinking is not a concatenation of Humean ideas. Thinking is an integrated, autonomous activity. And it is in that activity that I find my reality, and it is the inwardness of that activity that I call my mind, my self, my *psuchê*. Thus, granted that I am my brain; still, my brain is a relatively autonomous organism,[xxxv] and it is the inwardness of that autonomous organism that is my reality, my mind, my soul. And that inwardness is what I call subjectivity. The intelligent mind is not aware of its reality; its reality is its awareness.

In the “Remark on the Third Antinomy” Kant says that though the thesis affirming that “the faculty of beginning a series in time entirely on its own (*von selbst*)” is proved, yet “no insight into it is achieved.”[xxxvi] To my mind this reveals a serious and seriously damaging fault in conventional philosophic thinking — that it needlessly limits its purview to discursive thought. Otherwise I don’t see how any intelligent person can say that we have no insight into spontaneous origination when every sentence we utter, let alone every poem or song or tale, is an instance of creativity, is an instance of a directly experienced act of creation. — Kant, in whose system the term ‘intuition’ (*Anschauung*) features prominently, narrows and depletes the notion and removes it from the richest and profoundest areas of our experience.

Similarly, when Kant says that “reason creates the idea of a spontaneity, which could start to act from itself, without needing to be preceded by any other cause that in turn determines it to action according to the law of causal connection”,[xxxvii] I would say rather that reason does not create for itself the idea of spontaneity as it creates for itself the idea of causality. It knows the reality of spontaneity in the immediacy of awareness. Causality is a working fiction; spontaneity is a lived reality, an aspect of our inner reality.

“The final aim”, Kant says, “to which in the end the speculation of reason in its transcendental use is directed concerns three objects: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God.”[xxxviii] Pure philosophy is concerned with these three problems. These in turn boil down to the question of what is to be done “if the will is free, if there is a God, and if there is a future world.”[xxxix] Kant not only narrows the scope of ‘pure philosophy’ unnecessarily, but, more seriously, harms the autonomy and degrades the worth of the moral life. Philosophy is not concerned with ‘what is to be done IF etc.’ but with what is to be done SINCE we are creative intelligent beings that have insight into the ideals of eternity, reality, and goodness, ideals which are real in us and which constitute our reality and our worth. Since we are intelligent, creative beings, since that is our proper character and our true worth, if we understand ourselves as such, there is nothing for us but to live as such. Only that is wholesome for us. That is what Socrates and that is what Plato taught: our true worth, our true well-being, is to live intelligently, is to care for and to preserve that in us which thrives by doing what is consistent with intelligence and is harmed by doing what is inconsistent with intelligence: that is the sum of Socrates’ life, that is the gist of the whole of Plato’s philosophy. It takes away from this to be good because there is a God, to do good because there is a future life. Plato may or may not have believed in a future life, but he, following Socrates, most emphatically held that we must be good because only in being good are we true to ourselves, only by being good do we live the life proper to a human being, a being whose proper character is intelligence. That is why we should not (cannot, rather, if we are true to our humanity) live in deception, that is why we should not follow false or illusory values. And that is the sum of morality.

Kant sums up the interest of reason, speculative and practical, in the following three questions: (1) What can I know? (2) What should I do? (3) What may I hope?[xl] I answer these questions as follows:

(1) I can know

(a) the appearances of things in the outer world, without penetrating to their essence, or origin, or purpose, and

(b) the realities within me, principally my own inner reality.

(2) I should value, care for, preserve my proper reality as active, creative, intelligence, and should take care not to harm or damage that reality.

(3) Any hope beyond my present life is delusion, and in my present life, I may seek to live pleasantly, quietly, happily, but to think that it is in my power to secure that is folly. I cannot expect happiness, and to make happiness a prime end can lead to injury to my only certain good, the integrity of my inner reality.

Kant believed he had spoken the last word in philosophy. He was wrong, not due to any defect in his system, but because there is no last word in philosophy. The philosophical endeavour is even more radically insusceptible to completion than the scientific endeavour. Not only must philosophy remain an ever-renewed expression of the reality within us, but philosophy is also necessitated by its own central principle ever to destroy the foundations of its structures — Penelope-like, to be true to her own heart and to her absent lord, ever to unweave by day what she wove by night.

## KANT'S VIOLATION OF THE LIMITS OF PURE REASON

On the strength of the separation between the understanding, which applies concepts to phenomena, and pure reason, which reflects on its own ideas, pure reason is found incompetent to pass judgment on the outer world. Yet Kant makes Practical Reason, which should be concerned solely with moral issues, rule on questions beyond its legitimate jurisdiction. Further, in the *Critique of Judgment*, having given us an area for 'determinative judgment' where we have empirical knowledge and another area for 'reflective judgment' which yields 'regulative principles', Kant inconsistently goes on to make the regulative principles of reflective judgment yield knowledge about God and the immortality of the soul, knowledge which he had shown lies outside the purview both of pure reason and of empirical knowledge.

Thus Kant's inability to shed off the residue of religious belief harms his philosophical position. He avers that moral belief has an inescapably fixed end and that the only condition under which this end is consistent with all ends as a whole is that there be a God and a future world.[xli] He thus negates the autonomy of morality and turns the categorical imperative into a conditioned, contingent maxim. Kant condemns himself to live with a split mind when he seeks to combine the above statement with "moral principles ... which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes", or to combine his determination to believe in the existence of God and a future life with his categorical denial of the possibility of knowing that there is a God and a future life. A God out there in the world can neither be discovered there by science nor installed there by reason — not even by Practical Reason. The only viable God must be a God confined within the bounds of the mind.

Kant says, "Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith." [xlii] This can be and has been put to bad use by proponents of dogmatic religion. When Socrates renounced 'knowledge' he did not make room 'for faith' but 'for intelligence', for active, creative reason. When the mind transcends the limits of knowledge and works purely through pure concepts, it does not give us knowledge or belief — which is pseudo-knowledge — but gives us visions that have intrinsic intelligibility and inherent reality but which do not have and cannot aspire to have reference to objective actuality. The faith that Kant made room for, if Kant were to be consistent with himself, would not mean belief in a definite set of propositions. It would be the acknowledgment of rational ideals, ideals created by the mind, affirming the reality of creative intelligence.

In the *Critique of Judgment* (Section 88, "Restriction of the Validity of the Moral Proof"), while acknowledging that the concept of a final purpose is "merely a concept of our practical reason" and that we cannot "apply it to cognition of nature", Kant yet insists that "we have a moral basis for thinking that, since there is a world, there also is a final purpose of creation." [xliii] Thus Kant continues to oscillate between acknowledging that pure reason, working solely with its pure ideas, cannot yield objective knowledge, and his desire to affirm the validity of the postulates of practical

reason, between the strict consequences of his critical epistemology and his religious convictions. There is no way to unite these two drives in a common field of knowledge. In trying to accomplish this impossible feat Kant creates for himself an irresolvable dilemma and lays himself open to the charge of inconsistency. Apart from the empirical knowledge we have of the world by the procedures of the sciences, we can know nothing of the world outside us (which includes our own physical being). We can have no answer to ultimate questions when applied to the world. That is a limitation that we have to accept humbly. Theologians and scientists are equally deluded when they think they can answer such questions.

Kant allows practical reason “the right to assume something which it would in no way be warranted in presupposing in the field of mere speculation without sufficient grounds of proof; for all such presuppositions injure the perfection of speculation, about which, however, the practical interest does not trouble itself at all.”[xliv] But this concession, which Kant finds necessary in the interest of morality, not only breaches the integrity of the rational being, but is, besides being unjustified, actually unneeded. We have no need to assume the soul, the Good (Kant’s perfect being, God), the All, as objective entities. These are forms that give us, make us into, a reality we actually enjoy here and now within ourselves. Kant could not entirely free himself of the theological dream of a yonder and hereafter. Even Plato was not entirely free of that yearning. But to be completely rational and completely free we have to acknowledge that the only eternity we have a right to expect is the eternity of the supra-temporal reality we live ephemerally in our momentary life here and now. — We don’t have to assume or assert a reality outside us, for we have all the reality we need within us.

## BEYOND THE ILLUSIONS OF PURE REASON

Kant’s ‘understanding’ corresponds to Plato’s *dianoia* (in the Divided Line of the *Republic*: Plato did not stick to any fixed terminology), where the mind can legislate for the phenomenal world because what it may find in the

world of regularity is only the order the mind itself confers on the world through ideas born in the mind. Here the mind finds meaning and order in the world as the world presents itself to the mind, but cannot go beyond the immediate presentations of the world. Yet beyond and above the *dianoia*, Plato had a place for *nous*, *noêsis*, *phronêsis*. Here the mind is not concerned with the phenomenal world but only with its own pure ideas, which are what is real in the truest sense. Kant too had a region of pure reason where the mind dealt with nothing but its own ideas, but Kant did not have the creative audacity of Plato that made of that region the realm of the highest Reality.

Kant tells us that “through the critique of our reason we finally know that we cannot in fact know anything at all in its pure and speculative use”,[xlv] in other words, through the ideas of pure reason alone and through the operations and processes of pure reason alone one cannot have factual, objective, knowledge. From a Platonic position, I readily admit that pure reason has nothing to do with objective truth. Pure reason produces visions of reality that create meaningful worlds within us, worlds in which we, as rational beings, live and move and have our proper human being. These visions are dreams, no more, but it is in these dreams, and only in these dreams, that we have our spiritual life, our spiritual reality. We are creators of worlds of our own and it is in these ideal worlds of ours that we have our worth and our glory or our misery and our perdition. Thus while, by means of reason pure and simple, unaided by empirical experience, we have no knowledge of objects, no objective knowledge, we do have a subjective life that has no need to go to the outside world for confirmation.

The pure transcendental ideas – the soul, the final origin of all things, freedom – are, according to Kant, natural to human reason, but they “effect a mere, but irresistible, illusion,” whose deception is hard to resist.[xlvi] The deception Kant wants us to guard against is the deception we fall to in theological or metaphysical speculation when we fancy that we can deduce from the ideas of pure reason the actual constitution of ultimate reality. Kant was right in warning us against the illusion of thinking that pure reason can give us factual knowledge about the world, the All, or ultimate reality. But in so doing Kant leaves us in want of something of the utmost importance for us as human beings. Though through ‘transcendental ideas’ we can never



know the natural world, yet in them we comprehend the world. In the idea of ‘the absolute whole of appearances’ I do not take possession of the whole of appearances but I have possession of the idea of the Whole – an idea in which we humans transcend our ephemerality, our transience, our pettiness. When Thales said that the whole of *phusis* is water, he may have been speaking scientific nonsense (or making a crude start on the way to a scientific theory of the constituents of nature) but he was creating a vision through which he rose above the whole of space and the whole of time, and raised us with him. When Plato weaves of the intelligible forms a picture of the world, he is quick to tell us that the account he gives is no more than a ‘likely tale’, *tôn eikotôn muthôn*.<sup>[xlvii]</sup> The pure intelligible forms, which give us no objective knowledge, and which cannot be embodied in any definitive theoretical formulation are nevertheless the realm in which we have our intelligent being, in which we live intelligently and have our proper life as human beings. This is the spiritual realm which Kant’s transcendental system fails to account for. It is a mode of life, a plane of being, that has to be, and can only be, realized in constant creation of myth, acknowledged as myth, in art, in poetry, in metaphysical systems that declare themselves to be merely ‘likely tales’, and in the ideals of honour, friendship, loyalty, patriotism, which the cynic has no difficulty in showing to be one and all illusory. The cynic lives in the world of fact, the ‘deluded’ idealist lives in eternal reality.

Kant’s critical system undermines the Rationalists’ ‘dogmatic metaphysics’ which aspired to attain supersensible knowledge. But without metaphysics, without that ‘supersensible knowledge’, we are less than human. Human beings have an ingrained need to relate to the All; they have a need to see themselves whole; they have a need to find in their life and their being meaning and coherence. To live in a world that is not all “sound and fury, signifying nothing”, we need metaphysics, we need the idea of the All, the idea of the soul, the idea of freedom. These are creative ideas which give unity and meaningfulness to the insubstantial, transient givenness of the experiential stream. It is when we endue these ideas with objectivity, with independence of the intelligence that bred them, that we fall into illusion. I possess my soul, I live intelligently in my ideal world, I am in communion

with the God – the absolute Reality – within me; but when I think of my soul as existing apart from my individuality, when I think I can know anything of the world as a whole other than as presented phenomenally in my experience, when I think I can discover a God other than the God within me, then I err. Plato would agree with Kant that objects can be given to us only in sensibility. But the highest order of knowledge for Plato is not knowledge of objects but is the insight of the mind (*nous*, *phronêsis*) into itself, disclosed in pure ideas engendered by the mind itself. It is true that Plato spoke of the immortality of the soul, of the origination of the cosmos, of a celestial sphere of eternal forms, of God and gods in the yonder and hereafter; in all of that Plato was a poet giving creative expression to the realities bred by the mind: it is in such dreams that the creative mind lives its own reality. That ‘supersensible knowledge’ was alone for Plato true *epistêmê*. The supersensible ideas and the Form of the Good that constitute the highest knowledge, are affirmed and expressed in thoughts and myths that must be constantly subjected to dialectic demolishing. In Plato the only reality that abides is *phronêsis*, the mind as pure creative activity.

Kant ends the section “On the impossibility of an ontological proof of God’s existence” with a short paragraph which shows clearly how Kant’s outlook falls short of Plato’s. After denouncing the futility of attempting to prove the existence of a highest being from concepts, Kant affirms that “a human being can no more become richer in insight from mere ideas than a merchant could in resources if he wanted to improve his financial state by adding a few zeros to his cash balance.”[xlvi] Anselm, Descartes, Leibniz, all had an inkling of a ‘truth of the heart’. We have the idea of a perfect being. That idea must be ‘real’. They sought to prove that by logical demonstration. Kant shows that their logic was faulty. Thus far he is in the right. But when he goes on to assert that a human being cannot “become richer in insight by mere ideas”, he misses something — indeed, I would say, he negates what is most important in the philosophical endeavour. Plato did not try to prove the ‘existence’ of the Form of the Good. He proclaimed that the Form of the Good is all that we know of what is truly real. Our conception of the Good is what gives us reality, what makes us real. While on a lower plane the ideas engendered in the mind shed intelligibility on the

phenomenal world, on a higher plane, philosophy, in its pure use, gives us insight into and understanding of the life of intelligence in us that is the only real thing we know. Philosophy gives us ourselves, gives us our reality.

Metaphysics at its best is mythologizing — a mythologizing that affirms the reality of creative intelligence. It is this that vouchsafes its rationality. Formally, the rationality of such mythologizing consists in its intelligibility, its intrinsic coherence. I understand dialectic not as logical deduction and demonstration, but, with the Plato of the *Republic*, as the annihilation of all the grounds of our reasoning[xlix] — an annihilation that leaves us with nothing but the pure activity of creative reasoning itself, with pure creative intelligence as the final reality.

Shakespeare takes a silly and improbable story as the framework for a play and then makes us live through passions, emotions, and reflections more real than much of what we encounter or experience in the ‘real’ world. This is akin to what philosophers who engage in metaphysical system-building do: they create for us ideal worlds endowed with meaningfulness.

Notes:

[i] *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[ii] *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

[iii] See my *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005), ch. 3 “The Socratic Elenchus”.

[iv] *Parmenides* 130e.

[v] *Phaedo* 95e-101e.

[vi] My own usage of the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ differs from Kant’s, but in discussing Kant’s position the terms have the sense given them by Kant. I have to ask the reader’s indulgence for this discrepancy.

[vii] For a fuller discussion see my *Plato: An Interpretation*, pp.126-129.

[viii] Those who speak of a so-called Theory of Forms of the youthful Plato that he discarded in his later years are misled by Aristotle who constructed the putative ‘theory’ out of Plato’s experimentations with encapsulating the basic insight in a verbal formula, experimentations with the outcome of none of which Plato could rest satisfied. Once more I have to refer the reader to my *Plao: An Interpretation*, ch.1, pp.30-44, and ch.5, pp.117-122. (What other members of the Academy made of the ‘theory’ is another matter.)

[ix] *Phaedo* 79c-d.

[x] *Phaedrus* 247b-278e.

[xi] Plato’s Seventh Letter 341c-344a.

[xii] *Republic* 533c.

[xiii] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I.5, tr. R. J. Hollingdale.

[xiv] A51, B75, p.193-4.

[xv] Introduction, A15, B29, p.135 and pp.151-2.

[xvi] B161, p.262.

[xvii] Bxii, p.108.

[xviii] Bxiii, p.109.

[xix] A125, p.241.

[xx] A126, p.242.

[xxi] A127, p.242.

[xxii] Preface to the second edition, Bxvi, p.110.

[xxiii] A236, B295, pp.354-5.

[xxiv] B146, p.254.

[xxv] B148, p.255.

[xxvi] Kant, agreeing with Aristotle's usage, takes dialectic to be a logic of illusion (*Schein*). This is diametrically opposed to Plato's usage, where dialectic (in the *Republic* anyhow) is the highest level of philosophizing. It is best to keep the difference within its proper limits as a different choice of terminology.

[xxvii] A327, B383, p.402.

[xxviii] A334, B391, p.405.

[xxix] A334, B391, pp.405-6.

[xxx] A70, B95, p.206.

[xxxi] B275-6, p.327.

[xxxii] A22, B37, p.157 and p.174.

[xxxiii] B278, p.328.

[xxxiv] B152-3, p.257.

[xxxv] Since we are part of the universe there is no absolute autonomy for any particular thing.

[xxxvi] A450, B478, p.486.

[xxxvii] A533, B561, p.533.

[xxxviii] A798, B826, p.673.

[xxxix] A800, B828, pp.674-5.

[xl] A805, B833, p.677.

[xli] A828, B856, p.689.

[xlii] Preface to the second edition, Bxxx, p.117.

[xliii] Ak.454-5, p.345.

[xliv] A776, B804, p.662.

[xlv] A769, B797, pp.658-9.

[xlvi] A642, B670, p.590.

[xlvii] *Timaeus* 59c.

[xlviii] A602, B630, p.569.

[xlix] *Republic* 533c-d.

## GOD OR NATURE: THE EVOLUTIONIST-CREATIONIST CONTROVERSY

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The battle raging between creationists and evolutionists is probably the one that raises the greatest hubbub on the intellectual front at present. Though, as will presently appear, I do not regard this as a properly philosophical issue, still I think there is call for philosophers to clear some of the confusions and misunderstandings that envelop the battleground.

I maintain that philosophy, exercising pure reason, cannot give us knowledge about the objective world. Socrates, the first thinker to realize this clearly, decisively renounced all investigation into *phusis*. He was concerned solely with the ideas and ideals that constitute our specifically human life. Subsequent philosophers, beginning with Plato, in various degrees obscured or lost sight of this great Socratic insight, and in consequence embroiled philosophy in many needless difficulties and controversies. (Among moderns it was Kant, in his critical philosophy, who revived the Socratic insight, with some complications, but his successors again lost it with a vengeance.) That's why I say that the evolutionist-creationist controversy is not properly a philosophical problem.

Again I say that the advocates of religion are ill-advised to be drawn into

the controversy. Creationism is a theory relating to the objective world and as such it is a scientific theory — good or bad, reconcilable or irreconcilable with other theories: these are questions to be resolved by the methods of science, and what might be regarded as established truth today may be reversed tomorrow, and in no case will that have any bearing on questions of value. For let us grant the creationists that we could prove by impeccable scientific methods that the world was created by a personal god. Here is a theory, as mad and as good as any other: Before the Big Bang there was another universe (why not?) that had culminated in the evolution (let's have the best of both worlds) of an all-powerful god. That god programmed a terramicro chip to produce the Big Bang and all that followed it up to the scribbling of these words of mine. (I know this is not only nonsense but bad nonsense to boot; someone more clever than I can surely produce a more plausible version.)

Suppose this theory were established by rigorous scientific methods as true. Must I then adore, honour or admire that god? No; I would cry in his face, Damn you for all the evil and all the suffering you have put into your scheme of things. I would accept the facts as facts but that would have no bearing on my ideals and values.

Yet there is no comfort here for the scientific camp. For just as the empirical vindication of the personal god would not give him any claim on my respect, so the discovery of the minutest details of the process by which the world has come to be, would give us no understanding of that world, whether brought about by a personal fiat or an impersonal evolution.

But here we have to stop for a lexical digression. The words 'knowledge' and 'understanding' are very troublesome. They both refer to two radically different things, two totally different realms of our mental life; let us call them the objective and the subjective. The ideal solution would be to appropriate one of the terms to each of the two distinct realms. Sounds simple. The trouble is: (1) there is no consensus and there has never been; (2) more seriously, enthusiasts for the objective kind simply deny the existence of the other kind and lay claim to both terms. So that when we ask, Does the genome project give us knowledge of a human being?, they



answer, Yes; and when we ask, Does it give us understanding of a human being?, again they answer, Yes. I would say that the genome project gives us the knowledge that (hopefully) may enable us to cure or prevent diseases, to resolve forensic mysteries, perhaps to reproduce Hitlers, Pol Pots, and Ariel Sharons at will, but it does not give us the insight necessary to put an end to the evil of such monsters. Now take whichever word you like for the one kind and leave me the other word for the other kind. (See “Knowledge and Understanding”.)

When Richard Dawkins is challenged by creationists to “give an example of a genetic mutation or an evolutionary process which can be seen to increase the information in the genome” he writes a full-length article about ‘information’ as technically defined by the American engineer Claude Shannon in 1948. (“The Information Challenge” by Richard Dawkins, <http://www.skeptics.com.au/journal/dawkins1.htm> ) That technical definition is no doubt a very good and very fruitful definition when it is used for what it was devised for. But is it the only possible definition of the term? Does it give the only valid meaning of the term? In fact, in line with all scientific thinking, it is averse to all meaning and meaningfulness. It seizes on an extraneous feature of the object of inquiry, symbolizes it, quantifies it, drains it of all life and all meaning, and lives happily with its parched shell.

I am not here to defend the imbecilities of ‘creationism’, but if the creationists’ challenge meant to affirm that no description of any genetic mutation or evolutionary process can give us an understanding of, say, vision or consciousness, I would say that Dawkins has failed to meet the challenge. If there were no intelligence and creativity at the heart of nature (as distinct from creation by an outside agent), then I cannot see how the mere putting together of bits and bytes – even DNA bits and bytes – could produce our feelings and thoughts.

In other words, it is right that evolutionists should have our attentive and respectful ear when they describe, step by step, how consciousness came about, but when they tell us that is all there is to consciousness, we must object to a reductionism that bars our intelligence from looking into an entire realm of being.

But while I would thus agree with, say, Stephen Jay Gould that science should limit itself to studying the natural world, I would not agree with him in relegating the study of meanings and values to religion. If asked, Why not?, I would pose two questions in response: (1) Shall we accept the dogmatic dictates of religion on trust, putting our reason to sleep? (2) What about the conflicting claims of different religions? I hold that our worth as human beings resides in our reason and spirituality. So while, in opposition to religion, I maintain that it would undermine our dignity to accept anything as lying outside the jurisdiction of reason, in opposition to scientism, I maintain that our proper worth as human beings resides in the ideas, ideals and dreams that are creations of the mind and that cannot be reduced to the givennesses of the phenomenal world. It is only in a philosophy that jealously guards its independence of science that we can find the combination of reason and spirituality that is necessary for a whole human life.

All attempts at reconciling science and religion or science and philosophy are equally misguided, though for different reasons. Philosophy is not equipped to deal with facts and science is not equipped to deal with meanings and values. (I resist a temptation to digress on a discussion of social sciences and psychology.) But religion cannot avoid making factual claims. To attempt any reconciliation with science means submitting itself to the jurisdiction of scientific methods and scientific criteria, and that will always be damaging to the dogmatic claims of religion. The best policy for adherents of religion would be to maintain that their revealed truths are not amenable to scrutiny, which amounts to a deliberate choice of stupidity. All apologetics are doubly stupid because while committed in principle to mindlessness they venture on a contest that can only be fought with the weapons of intelligence.

Finally, the creationist-evolutionist dispute amounts to the question: Do we have to thank God or Nature for what we are?, and in arbitrating between the two parties philosophy should declare that as long as the question is posed in that form, we can never arrive at a satisfactory answer. It is only Spinoza's unified God-or-Nature that can account for the whole that we are. And of

that whole, science is concerned with the natural dimension, philosophy with the divine dimension – or, to resort once again to Spinoza's language, science has to do with *natura naturata* and philosophy with *natura naturans*.

## WHAT IS GOD?

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“Yif god is, whennes comen wikkede thinges? And  
yif god ne is, whennes comen gode thinges?”

(Chaucer’s rendering of Boethius, *De  
Consolatione Philosophie*, Book I.  
Prose IV.)

I have repeatedly complained of the shallowness, triviality, and anaemia of current theism/atheism discussions. In the following contribution (hopefully to be followed by others) I mean to infuse some lifeblood into the discussion. If, on whichever side of the discussion you may be, you still find much in what I say with which you strongly disagree, which indeed irritates you, that will be all the better. I mean to stir stagnant waters, inject turbulence into placid intellectual positions.

The idea of a creator or of creation is metaphysically bankrupt. It is a silly notion that breeds more riddles than it solves. In fact it solves nothing. If we ask: Why should there be anything rather than nothing?, we see immediately that there can be no answer. To advance the idea of a creator to resolve the mystery of being does nothing but confound and complicate the issue. In the first place, the ultimate mystery remains where it was. For why should there be that creator or first being rather than not? There is no answer. Moreover

we have the riddle of why the creator took it into its head to produce something where there was nothing. Being is the ultimate mystery and there is no way to make it yield to our questioning. We have to accept it on its own terms.

It would be easy to see the idea of a creator producing the world as the understandably crude attempt by human beings in the infancy of humanity to resolve the riddle. The answer would easily suggest itself to them on the analogy of their own production of things.

Why do so many humans today accept that answer and believe it to be reasonable and obvious? The answer again is simple. Traditional cultures inculcate it in them. If you ask, Why should we accept those traditions as true?, the traditional answer is that that answer was revealed by that creator itself. Who says that? That same tradition. We have to believe the traditional doctrine because the tradition tells us it was revealed by the creator and we have to believe that it was revealed by the creator because the tradition tells us that.

I say it would be easy to see the fatuity of all that, if only we could bring ourselves to think for ourselves. Unfortunately, most of us do not think for ourselves. It is so much more comfortable to have others think for us and to receive our mass-produced thought finely packaged, home delivered, user-friendly, and with promises of luring rewards thrown into the bargain.

Let us ask again: Why should we believe our traditional teachings? Because they come from God. Well, let us close our eyes to the circularity of the answer. Let us look at the credentials of that God as that tradition itself presents him. Let us try for a while to put aside the reverence and awe instilled in us by our traditional upbringing and look at the God of the Pentateuch, the God of Paul, the God of the Book of Revelation, the God of the Koran. Let us judge him by the common moral standards that we now accept in decent, civilized society. We find him a liar, a despot, a capricious, vengeful, cruel creature. True, we will find in the Torah, in the Gospels, and in the Koran, many fine sentiments and ideals. But we find similar and even finer ones in cultures either with no gods or with gods we no longer take seriously, which should show us that those sentiments and ideals which we

rightly value are independent of belief in our monotheistic God.

So much for the cosmological argument for the existence of God. Let us move on to ontology.

The question Does God exist? is inane. The existence of the existent does not need proof. You go to a primitive tribesman and ask him: 'Does God exist?' He answers: 'Of course. Come, I'll show you.' He takes you into his cave or his hut and shows you the effigy he worships saying, 'Here is God.' What proof better than that can you ask for? On the other hand, how would you go about proving the non-existence of God? To try to prove logically the non-existence of an unknown nothing is the height of absurdity, the worst kind of eristic juggling.

The sensible thing then is not to ask: 'Does God exist?' but to ask: 'What do we mean by God?' Throughout the history of humankind, humans have had many differing ideas of God. Many of the old conceptions are no longer taken seriously by present-day members of the human race, so we can leave those to anthropologists. What about extant ideas within the established religions? Then, you may argue that the Yahweh of the Old Testament is revolting, the God of the New Testament is replete with contradictions equally with the Allah of the Koran. So what? There is no logical impossibility in the idea of a being mighty and clever enough to make the universe and run it in accordance with its whims and who may yet be as imperfect and as unaccountable as Yahweh or God or Allah.

A. N. Whitehead's final answer to the question, What is God? is summed up in the final paragraph of chapter III of his *Religion in the Making* (1926). I will quote this beautiful paragraph in full:

"The order of the world is no accident. There is nothing actual which could be actual without some measure of order. The religious insight is the grasp of this truth: That the order of the world, the depth of reality of the world, the value of the world in its whole and in its parts, the beauty of the world, the zest of life, the peace of life, and the mastery of evil, are all bound together—not accidentally, but by reason of this truth: that the universe exhibits a creativity with infinite

freedom, and a realm of forms with infinite possibilities; but that this creativity and these forms are together impotent to achieve actuality apart from the completed ideal harmony, which is God.”(1)

Does this prove the existence of God? The question is, strictly speaking, meaningless. What Whitehead gives us is a way of looking at the world, a vision of the world, in which the world exhibits meaningfulness and value. And the gist of that outlook is that, if we are to find meaning and value in the universe, we must see order, coherence, intelligence, and goodness as ultimate characters of reality. This is what I mean when I say that to be is to be good, when I maintain that ultimate reality must be intelligent and good, when I describe ultimate reality as Creative Eternity and say that Creative Eternity is Love.(2)

If we replace ‘the soul’ by ‘God’ in the famous proof of the immortality of the soul in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (3), we have an exquisite ‘proof’ of the eternity of God. But what would the ‘proof’ prove after all? Nothing. It would neither prove the existence of God nor would it tell us anything about what God is. What it does is to establish the ideal reality of our idea of eternity, in the same way as Plato’s ‘proof’ both in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* and his arguments in the *Phaedo* establish the reality of the ideals of autonomy and integrity embedded in the Socratic-Platonic concept of the soul.(4)

But while some of the philosophers I admire most speak of God and though I could without qualm declare that I believe in God in a very real and profound sense, yet I think it advisable to avoid using the term ‘God’ in philosophical discussion, since a philosopher using the term will find it necessary to spend as much time explaining what s/he does not mean as expressing what s/he does mean. The same holds for the term ‘faith’. I could readily affirm that without a core of faith philosophy would be vacuous and valueless. But this word ‘faith’ is laden with untoward associations with the ideas of revelation and dogma. While therefore I maintain that reason is not only compatible with, but is in fact meaningless without, a certain something that could be called faith, yet in general I try to keep clear of this suspect word.

Because this sounds so complicated, let me put it in a different way. Faith as commonly understood is, in my view, a mockery of reason and an insult to human intelligence, and the usual attempts to reconcile faith and reason turn out to be no more than word jugglery or self-deception. But on the other hand, through mere reason we cannot find our way to any reality or any value. Kant had to support and supplement pure reason with practical reason. Kant's followers restored Reason to the Whole to rescue it from its sterile purity. Whitehead put reality and value back into the world by insisting on the integrity of experience. These were all insightful moves. To preserve our dignity and our worth as human beings, we must have unfettered Reason, but it must be Reason with a throbbing heart. I hold that the one way to achieve that object is to find all reality and all value within ourselves. The self-evidence of the reality and value within us is the Faith we need, is the God the believers craved and the unbelievers sacrificed.

William Ernest Hocking expresses this elusive idea well in the following words: "The birth of the idea of God in the mind – the judgment 'Reality is living, divine, a God exists' – is so subtle, like the faintest breath of the spirit upon the face of the waters, that no look within can tell whether God is here revealing himself to man, or man creating God."(5)

If I have not irritated you enough already, dear Reader, let me tease you with some mystic-mongering:

god is real  
therefore god does not exist  
for reality is opposed to existence  
the circumference of a circle is not in the circle  
the circumference is not outside the circle  
the circumference does not exist  
it is an idea  
it is a reality  
it does not exist  
but without it no circle exists  
there may be round things in the world



but without that reality that does not exist  
no round thing is a circle  
nor is it even round  
god is an idea  
god is real  
god does not exist  
but without that real god that does not exist  
no thing in the world has meaning  
no thing in the world has value  
no thing in the world has reality  
no thing in the world has existence  
the idea that constitutes my world is my idea  
it springs from my mind  
my idea encompasses my world  
whose idea constitutes the world encompassing me?  
what mind gives it birth?  
that is a question no one can answer  
neither science nor pure reason can tell  
that is a question about which we can only mythologize  
and mythologize we must  
without mythologizing our world rots  
but when we forget that our myths are myths  
the mind that created the myths rots  
rots and dies and petrifies  
with the death of the mind  
god dies  
god then exists  
but is no longer real  
that dead existing god is the god of religion

Maximus of Tyre in the second century of the Christian era wrote winged words in his beautiful “defence of idols” with which I like to close this essay: “Let men know what is divine (*to theion genos*), let them know: that

is all. If a Greek is stirred to the remembrance of God by the art of Pheidias, an Egyptian by paying worship to animals, another man by a river, another by fire — I have no anger for their divergences; only let them know, let them love, let them remember.”(6)

Footnotes:

- (1) Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 1926, pp.119-20.
- (2) See my *Let Us Philosophize*, 1998, 2008, Book Two “Reality”.
- (3) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245c-246a.
- (4) See my *Plato: An Interpretation*, 2005, especially chapters 5, 7, and 12.
- (5) William Ernest Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, 1912, “The Will as a Maker of Truth”, reproduced in *Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1954, ed. Daniel J. Bronstein and Harold M. Schulweis, p.20.
- (6) Maximus of Tyre, quoted by Gilbert Murray in *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, 1935, p.77, n.1.

## THOUGHTS TOWARDS A CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

When we are born, we cry that we are come  
To this great stage of fools.

*King Lear*

[The following is a skeletal outline for a Critique of Religion that at one time I had hoped to write. I don't think it probable that I will live to do that. I offer the outline freely to anyone who would work it out. I have appended to the outline some disjointed but not unrelated thoughts.]

I

There is a fact so simple, so basic, that it is difficult to bring it to our attention. It is something I have repeatedly asserted in my writings but which I think bears endless reiteration and emphasis because its profound and far-reaching significance easily escapes us. It is that, in the literal and strictest sense of the words, we live our specifically human life in a world of ideas, ideas humanly created. As humans, in what characterizes us as humans, we live in a world of beliefs, conventions, superstitions, science-supported conceptions and theories — in a world of ideas. At the same time we live biologically as animals and exist physically as physical objects; in those dimensions we are subject to whatever physical things and animals are subject to; but in the dimension which gives us our human character we are

nothing but ideas. These ideas coalesce in collections of loosely related systems on various levels. I will pass over my ideas about my daily routine of life, about my work, about my social relations. I will also pass over my ideas about the possibility of the human race colonizing the moon within, say, five decades and also my ideas about the chances that the party winning the next elections will address my worst grievances. These are all ideas that, strictly speaking, shape my day to day life. On another level I may have ideas signifying that if I pray, in proper form, five times a day and keep certain rites and rituals then when I die I will go to paradise where I will enjoy fantastic pleasures; or that if I go to church, attend mass, and take holy communion then when I die I will go to a celestial heaven where I will continue to be endlessly; or alternatively that whatever I do, when I die I will be no more and the body that now I call mine will disintegrate and become part of the earth where it will have been buried. These systems of beliefs stand, *prima facie*, on an equal footing. (Many will jump at me for saying this; but patience; you may find me in the end to be on your side.) Now let me put the idea I have been putting forward in the above lines in a different form of words. Human beings, as human beings, exercise their living in, by, and through systems of ideas, the – let me not say highest – but most abstract and most rarefied echelon of which may properly be called ideologies. We could call those ideologies religions in a special sense of the word, but many will find this unacceptable. So let us say that a number of those ideologies are traditionally called religions, such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism; others may be called *Weltanschauungen*, which divide into a great number of isms, including scepticism and agnosticism which are decidedly positive systems of ideas.

## II

Religion is a human phenomenon. One could justifiably say that religion is a human property, in the logical sense of the term, an essential attribute of the human species. It would seem that however far back in the archaeological records of the earth we may go, we cannot find traces of a human group

without accompanying traces of acts and deeds indicating that they somehow related themselves to the powers they sensed or imagined behind the happenings shaping and governing their lives.

That the feelings of awe and wonder should arise in thinking beings in the face of the mysterious phenomena of life and death and the dreadful forces and happenings of the natural world surrounding them is not surprising. That these overwhelming feelings of awe and wonder should issue in imaginative attempts at explanation, in daring experiments at influencing those happenings, in desperate motions aimed at propitiating those forces, and that those explanations, experimentations, magical operations, should vary with time and place and appear in countless shapes and forms — all of that is only to be expected. All of that is amply exemplified in the records of archaeology, of anthropology, of history, of the extant human scene. This is the material of the study of comparative religion.

In time these primordial feelings developed into institutions, communal arrangements, behavioural patterns, speculative systems, that were often beautiful and precious, and as often or more often ugly and harmful. Hence the need for a critique of religion to help us discriminate between what is good and what is bad, what is essential and what is an accidental accretion.

For some reason, humans – alone among living beings as far as we can tell – are obsessed with the urge to seek explanations. ‘Why?’ seems to be a specifically human creation. To see something happen and not know what made it happen leaves us uneasy. An explanation, any explanation, puts the happening in a larger context which shows consistency, which shows kinship between the constituent elements of the larger situation, and that somehow relieves the uneasy feeling of puzzlement. Any imaginary explanation serves that primary purpose. It is only gradually that a primitive human being or a growing human child finds out that some explanations hold and some don’t. This has nothing to do with the emotional comfort given by the explanation; it has to do with its pragmatic serviceability. Thus it was inevitable that humans should at the earliest times form myths to explain the phenomena surrounding them and the happenings of their daily lives. Only later on did they begin to sort out and prune their myths,

applying the criteria of rationality and serviceability.

### III

Thus humans created myths to enjoy the sense of understanding, that peculiar human need. Over millennia the old myths were replaced with new explanations over a wide area of phenomena and happenings. But there remained other areas of human interest which proved impervious to the new methods of explanation. 'How did it all begin?', 'What happens when I die?' With regard to such questions we could adopt any of the following attitudes:

- (1) We could say that they were unanswerable and leave it at that.
- (2) We could hold on to myths of the old kind, as institutionalized religions do.
- (3) We could attempt to force those myths into the moulds of the new methods, as either in various projects of pseudo-science or in proper scientific hypotheses and theories which, while extending our factual knowledge of the phenomenal, inevitably fail to reach ultimate answers to ultimate questions.
- (4) We could produce new myths with a difference. This is the province of poetry and art. I maintain that metaphysical speculation also is such, creating myths that lay a veneer of intelligibility on the unintelligible. Such myths give us the ease of 'understanding' while preserving the integrity of our reason since we know our myths to be no more than beautiful tales.

### IV

Under the cloak of religion we commonly find four characters which it is necessary to distinguish and separate. First there is the religious feeling, the spiritual experience which in its most intense form is characterized as mystic. Second, there are beliefs and thought systems which may partly seek to interpret the religious feeling but which mainly seek to give answers to

natural, cosmological, and philosophical puzzles. Third, there are rites, ceremonies, and rituals, which mostly have their origin in magic and in endeavours to influence the processes of nature. Fourth, there is morality, with principles, maxims and codes of behaviour. I think it imperative first of all to insist on separating this last character.

Advocates of religion are vociferous in claiming that moral and spiritual values are inextricably bound up with some form of religion. This claim does not bear serious examination; it is utterly groundless. Morality arises and persists in complete independence of religion even though the two often get mixed together. Religion is more often than not damaging to morality. We can all readily verify by surveying in our mind the people with whom we have daily contact that the most religion-bound among them are not always the most morally sound while on the other hand among the least religion-bound we may find the most morally sound.

Next we have to separate the element of inward feeling, religion as a spiritual experience. This we stand in need to preserve. It is the element which those who fight against the evils of religion risk sacrificing because they fail to see it as a separate and most precious element. This is the element A. N. Whitehead has in mind when he defines religion as what one does with his solitariness. It is also the element that Schleiermacher refers to in saying:

“To have religion means to intuit the universe, and the value of your religion depends upon the manner in which you intuit it, on the principle that you find in its actions. Now if you cannot deny that the idea of God adapts itself to each intuition of the universe, you must also admit that one religion without God can be better than another with God.” (1)

The combination of religious feeling with fixed beliefs – dogmas – is most damaging; even when the beliefs are refined, they still obscure and impair the purity of the feelings.

If rite and ritual could be kept completely free of any dogmatic admixture, they could be useful as a communal bond, bringing people together and giving them a sense of belonging; they could also have value as an art-form. Unfortunately, once rite and ritual relate in any way to religion, it is impossible to keep them free of superstitious overtones.

So of the four characters wrongfully forced together under the flabby cloak of religion:

- (1) morality should simply be kept apart; it is secure in its independent life;
- (2) spiritual experience has to be rescued and preserved;
- (3) dogmatic beliefs and doctrines must be exposed and demolished;
- (4) rites and rituals, however aesthetically and emotionally valuable, if they have to go with what is bad in religion, so be it; humankind will never cease inventing other forms of communal and social cementing.

(2) and (3) are what I am concerned with in this series of essays. [At the time, I had the idea of replacing the original project of a book on religion by a series of essays.]

## V

If we ask, are any religious beliefs true?, again we have to distinguish carefully between various types of belief. Beliefs about moral values should not, strictly speaking, be called beliefs, and they can neither be true nor false. They are real(2) and valuable in so far as they affirm our inner reality. They can be narrow and trite when they are the reflection of an impoverished personality, and they can be sublime when they reflect the inner reality of a Gandhi.

Primitive beliefs about the creation and constitution of the world (which survive in institutionalized religions) were brave flights of the human intellect which have been and are being corrected by natural science. How



otherwise intelligent persons can hold on to such beliefs is to me simply baffling.

Beliefs about a supernatural world, about life after death, and the like, were also brave flights of imagination. In time, intelligent humans realized that all answers propounded to such questions are pure fiction. Yet today we have many people, intelligent and seemingly learned, who hold on to certain beliefs in this area. These believers may be subdivided into two classes: (1) the ones who maintain that we have to accept those beliefs on the authority of divine revelation; and (2) those who, in addition to trusting revelation, attempt to show that the beliefs can also be supported by reason.

The argument for revelation is always circuitous. We have to believe the doctrines handed down to us by the sacred books. Why? Because those books were revealed by God? Who says the books were revealed by God? The sacred books say it. Well, we could perhaps turn a blind eye to the illogic of such a shaky argument if those sacred books did not (one and all without exception) contain much that is atrocious, absurd and morally revolting.

As for those who attempt to provide rational support for their favoured beliefs, not only do theologians of one faith contradict those of other faiths, but the more theologians of one faith and creed attempt to refine and sophisticate their arguments, the more does every one of them find her/him/self at variance with their remaining co-religionists.

## VI

First a word to remove a possible misunderstanding. I have sometimes been decried because I spoke of spiritual life. For some materialists and atheists to speak of spiritual life is tantamount to dogmatism and belief in superstitions. I insist that without the conception of a spiritual life our cultural life and our rational discourse are seriously impoverished. For me the spiritual life is our subjective, inner life, which is the focal point and the source of all our worth and our proper being as humans. Let me explain.

‘Man liveth not by bread alone.’ This is a profound saying. We become

human when we realize that there is a side of us that is not body. Of course Plato had taught the same thing some four centuries before the Nazarene. And not Plato alone.

Imagine intelligent beings living in a world where they have ample, wholesome food without any relish, clothing good for winter and summer without any refinement, comfortable housing without a touch of beauty; they spend their day doing work well-suited to their strength and abilities and spend the night fast asleep. If they had no idea of any life different from that, they might be content with their lot as we imagine ants to be content with their lot. (Actually, I consider that impossible, because without a sense of the zest of life – I believe – there can be no life, but let the supposition stand.) But would anyone of us humans, however tried with troubles and pains in our human world she or he may be, bear to live in that materially perfect world?

Without song or dance, without a touch of poetry even in everyday language, without a thing of beauty for the eye to light upon, who of us would rather live than die?

That is what I mean by spiritual life. A life in which not all our cares and concerns are for the needs of the body. A life in which philosophical questions tease our intelligence, in which a line of Wordsworth sends a vibration through our inner being, in which Beethoven's Ninth makes us rise from the abyss of dejection to touch the stars; a life in which a kind word, a shy smile, gladden the heart — that I call spiritual life and have no other word for it than spiritual life.

Those who start in alarm at the word spiritual are like the proverbial one that dreads a rope because once bitten by a snake.

## VII

We need religion. We need to get rid of all religions. These two statements are not contradictory. To accept either alone as sufficient is to risk ending up with a deformed humanity. The reconciliation of these two propositions is arguably the most urgent and most critical task facing human culture and

human civilization at this juncture of human history.

Indeed, in one interpretation the claim that we need religion is justifiable — but that is an interpretation that sets Religion in opposition to all religions. That is the religion of the philosophers, the religion A. N. Whitehead speaks of in *Religion in the Making* and Julian Huxley in *Religion Without Revelation*. But since the whole issue of religion is submerged in confusion, mixing of issues, and muddled thinking, it would be best, in the interest of clear thinking, to avoid using the term ‘religion’ in that sterilized sense.

“Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness.” A. N. Whitehead repeats this definition more than once in his *Religion in the Making*.<sup>(3)</sup> By this definition Whitehead makes of rites, rituals, dogmas, and creeds mere external trappings. Unfortunately, these external trappings are the whole of religion for most followers of institutionalized religions. So it would seem that the simplest way, or perhaps the only way, to bring that religion of one’s own solitariness to its rightful place in human life is to do away with all ‘religion’. Today, nearly all discussion of religion, by advocates and opponents alike, tends to obliterate the notion of that spirituality necessary for a properly human life. To put it differently, it is bad religion that militates against our appreciating the importance of good religion. The word ‘religion’ has been thoroughly corrupted by bad company; it is best to give it up and speak of spirituality instead.

Perhaps only the most primitive of religions, living in isolation, did some good and little or no harm. Apart from these, all religions have done much more harm than good. And yet we cannot live without religion. Without religion we cannot be whole human beings. We desperately need an alternative to religion: not an alternative religion; that would only perpetuate the harm; but an alternative to religion. The alternative I propose is a culture, and education in a culture, that frees the human mind of all shackles and at the same time leaves it fully aware of its own reality and of a reality above and beyond its individual being and above and beyond all the finite and ephemeral existents and happenings of the natural world in which we have our finite and ephemeral being.

Our myths are the substance of our spiritual life. That is the paradox of human culture. Without myth our life is barren, bestial, banal. With myth unsubjected to critical reasoning it is stultifying. Only intelligent creative imagination can secure for us a spiritual life consistent with human dignity.(4)

So to the question, Do we need religion?, our answer should be, There is an element in what is commonly covered by the term religion that is necessary for true human life, but that element has to be very carefully and delicately isolated because it is always covered by layers upon layers of foul dross.

One thing that I never cease to find most bewildering is how highly intelligent persons, many professionally trained to think scientifically, accept unquestioningly the dogmas of whatever established religion they happen to be born into. Even in the case of religious conversion, the conversion rarely rests on intellectual grounds, and once the new faith is taken to heart, the dogmas and superstitions associated with it are accepted without question. I cannot help feeling baffled by this, but there are in fact multiple explanations for it. There are good psychological and anthropological explanations which I do not intend to go into here.

The religion of mystics, poets, and philosophers is all subjective, is an inner experience. The religion of the followers of the established religions is primarily objective, extraneous; it is bound up with creed and dogma, rites and rituals. These two types are so different, so opposed, that it would be best if they are not referred to by the same word. But good philosophers have spoken of religion, meaning the purer type; good poets have used religious language when giving expression to their subjective, spiritual, experience; and good musicians have composed great music on religious themes. All of this cannot be reversed. The resulting confusion is regrettable; all we can do is to draw the distinction clearly and try to keep it in mind.

## VIII

I have often argued against reductionist thinking. To track the origins of

something, to enumerate and describe its constituent elements, however accurately, however comprehensively, does not exhaust the reality of the thing. To suppose it does is the deadly error of reductionism. On all planes of being – on the most exalted plane of spiritual experience, on the most highly abstract plane of theoretical thinking, just as on the plane of emotional reaction or physical action – the activity is a modification of the whole person and is subtended by the totality of the individual. This does not in any way detract from the reality of the final flowering just as the origination and the grounding of the rose in soil and water and sunshine does not negate the reality of its fragrance and its radiance. So, on the one hand, I appreciate the theoretical justice of the protest against attempts to denigrate religion by showing its origins in magic, sorcery, shamanism, and the like. After all, art too must have grown out of such origins, and that does not belittle the importance of art and its necessity for a fully human life. On the other hand I say that an objective, a clear-headed study, of the history of religious beliefs, an unprejudiced and clear-sighted look at the phenomena of diverse religious beliefs and experiences displayed side by side, should convince any intelligent observer of the fictitiousness of the claims of all such religious beliefs and practices. In holding these two apparently opposed views I am not contradicting myself. The natural origination of religious beliefs and practices does not negate the emotive and spiritual reality of religious and mystic experience. The religious attitude and the religious feeling are part of the most valuable treasures of humankind. But this true core of religious experience necessarily always comes clothed in external trappings, the product of contingent circumstances, historical, cultural, social, etc., and it is imperative that we see these artificial trappings for what they are, that we clearly recognize the illusory character of the outward raiment shrouding the true essence. Without this insight we are trapped between two equally damaging intellectual tyrannies: on the one side, the tyranny of reductionist scientism, demanding that we forgo our inner reality, and on the other side, the tyranny of religious dogma, demanding that we forgo our right to question and to understand.

## IX

All established religions are shrouded in deception. Ordinary Christians are encouraged to believe that Christianity came into being whole and entire. They do not know that Christianity began to be forged by various persons and influences shortly after the departure of the putative founder of Christianity and that the new religion that was built up over generations and centuries has little to do with the thought or teaching of the man of Nazareth. This false belief is carefully guarded by the Church.

Mircea Eliade in *Cosmos and History*(5) recounts an incident that illustrates how the commonest of events can be mythicized within the lifetime of some of its original witnesses, or even of its participators. When we read that, we find it easy to understand how, within a few years of the tragic death of Jesus of Nazareth, that audacious moral reformer could be transformed into the Saviour, the Son of God, and God incarnate. (I do not mean to exclude the possibility that Jesus may have been led to believe he was the Messiah, but the Christian Messiah invented by Paul was very different from the Hebrew Messiah Jesus may have imagined himself to be.)

Beside the queer conceptions of Paul and the strange fantasies of John, Christianity had the good fortune of absorbing much of the cultural milieu of Hellenism. The best of what is in Christianity is borrowed from Platonism. What gives Christianity its lure to thoughtful and sensitive spirits is its Platonic core. Christianity is a core of Platonism hidden under layers upon layers of superstition.

Similarly, in the best specimens of present-day Islam there are embedded borrowings from Greek wisdom and Persian mysticism. Ordinary Moslems are encouraged to believe that all the highest ideals of humanity which have been absorbed by Moslem culture came to light only with Islam. This deception is perpetrated, consciously or unconsciously, even by writers and thinkers who should know better.

Again, the Buddhism that is followed by millions and that in many ways may be much better than all the other world religions has departed far from the teaching of Gautama Siddhartha. Are common Buddhists aware of this?

We may readily admit that every one of the major world religions played an important role in human history, but this does not mean that we have to submit to those religions and accept all the junk they came with originally and all the junk they accumulated along the way.

The argument that defendants of religion continue to advance in spite of its patent banality, namely, that without belief in an overruling God and in reward and punishment after death all people would behave immorally does not deserve serious consideration. Let any decent person look within her/him/self. A decent person does not behave properly for fear of punishment here or hereafter. There are two sources for the behaviour of ordinary decent human beings. On a lower key, people behave properly because they want to conform to social norms, because they value belonging to society. On a higher key, people do good deeds because, to put it simply, it feels good to do good. Benevolence is as natural as selfishness and anyone who has grown up in a good ambience soon learns by experience that benevolence gives greater satisfaction than selfishness. Providing the opportunity of such experience is indeed the essence of moral education in childhood.

X

Every time-honoured religious system existing in the world today is the dead body, dried and fossilized, of myths and rituals that may have at one time represented or symbolized something with some meaning in it. It could not have turned up as an established religion if it had not already lost all life and all meaning. It is possible that even today the dead body of a religion may house a living emotion for some of the followers of the religion. The living emotion is the subjective reality of the person concerned and is only accidentally related to the beliefs and practices of the particular religion. In fact the beliefs and practices hamper and constrain the living subjective experience. But in most cases only individuals with sufficient intelligence, intellectual integrity, and moral courage come to realize this. Unusual circumstances may also lead other individuals to this conclusion. It is the

duty of thinkers to widen the scope of this realization.

The history of religion on the world scale from the most primitive to the most sophisticated provides a coherent continuity, or at any rate a coherent progression, with the coherence of the evolution of species from primitive protozoa. The valiant, rather quixotic, efforts of theologians of the various religions – even students of Comparative Religion among them – to invent arguments founding their creeds on special revelations are exemplary instances of failure of self-criticism, or refusal to see the simple truth.

As I see it, in philosophy humanity has attained a level of intelligence above that of religion. It is simply unacceptable for humans to continue to think and live on the lower plane of religious thought and feeling. All the reasons and arguments advanced in defence of such religiosity is nothing better than self-deception. And – being the fool that I am – I will go on to alienate those who thus far will have been on my side. I will say that I speak of humanity attaining a higher level of understanding in philosophy, not in science. I reiterate here a position I have often stated.<sup>(6)</sup> It is not the function of science to give us the understanding we crave; that is the role of philosophy. I readily admit that science has been a most powerful tool in freeing human beings from the slavery of religious superstition. But we still have to realize that while science gives us power and gives us informational knowledge of the phenomenal world, of natural actualities and natural happenings, there remains a kind of *epistêmê* or rather a kind of insightful ignorance that it is the function of philosophy to give. A scientist finds satisfaction in knowing that water is reducible to hydrogen and oxygen. S/he is content with that knowledge and calls it understanding. A philosopher will say, with Socrates, that that knowledge does not answer the question, What is water? The mystery of oxygen and hydrogen becoming water with all its amazing original characteristics persists. It is the philosophical *aporia*, the confession of ignorance, that gives us the experience of the immediacy of awareness of that mystery, an awareness that is necessary for ridding us of the worst ignorance, the ignorance in the soul, that enslaves us to the delusion of understanding what we do not understand. In philosophy we learn that the only understanding we have, the understanding we should



seek, the understanding that is possible and simultaneously is all important for us, is the understanding of our motives, our emotions, our feelings, our attitudes. This is the understanding that constitutes true liberation. This is the essence of the injunction *gnôthi sauton* that Socrates gave us for heritage.

## XI

To conclude this rambling outline of a critique of religion, here is a collection of aphorisms and other jottings:

I care little for the god whose creatures we are; I care more for the God whose creators we are.

We humans are all fools and half-insane; it is good literature that gives us a flicker of sanity.

“Lord, what fools these mortals be!” — We are only wise when we know that all our wisdom is foolishness.

The worst effect of institutionalized religion is that it blocks the way to contemplation, to looking for reality and truth within one. Institutionalized religion is the worst enemy of that religion which A. N. Whitehead finds in what one does with one’s solitariness.

If we choose to take our leave from reason, we can always find a sophisticated Kierkegaardian interpretation of any deed, happening, or text, however irrational; we can invent a highly sophisticated construction for any statement however banal, as the pundits of the so-called scientific interpretation of the Koran have been nauseatingly demonstrating. Or even as some literary critics from time to time demonstrate. True, there is wisdom in folly and sometimes we have to be mad enough to break beyond and through the bonds of accepted wisdom; but we are only properly human when we reason. Some poetry, some art, designedly shows want of coherence and rationality. But unless beneath the apparent incoherence and

irrationality there is discoverable coherence and rationality it is not poetry and it is not art. Poetry is communication and art is communication and the condition of communication is intelligibility, coherence, rationality.

A human being cannot live by reason alone, but s/he cannot be human unless s/he live always under the searching beam of reason.

Perhaps a more serious evil that religion wreaks than even all the conflicts, animosities, and killings it inspires is that it kills the sense of wonder in a person. A person who has been fully saturated with religious thought may no longer be capable of experiencing the creative unease which impels a person to keep wondering why and how, since s/he has been habituated to the comfort of being contented with the ready answer: because God wanted it this way; because God made it this way. I will not delve into regions that are not mine, but perhaps historians may find in this an explanation for the stagnation of many a society.

I am all for the Sermon on the Mount. I take its injunctions more seriously, more foolishly, than this or that Pope. But if it comes packaged with Matthew's hell-fire, with Paul's obsessions, with John's mystifications, I would rather give up the whole package. I have all the morality I want in the *Crito* and the *Gorgias* and all the spirituality I need in poetry, in philosophy, and in music.

Footnotes:

(1) Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, tr. Richard Crouter, 1988, 1996, p.52.

(2) I use the term 'real' in a special sense, for which I would refer the reader to "On What Is Real: An Answer to Quine's 'On What There Is'", "Must Values Be Objective", and Chapters 5, 6, 7 of *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005).

(3) A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 1926, pages 16, 47, 58.

(4) The role of myth in human culture – in the spiritual life of humans – is a theme that runs throughout my writings. For a short presentation, see “Philosophy as Prophecy”.

(5) Mircea Eliade in *Cosmos and History*, tr. Willard R. Trask, 1954, 1959, pp.44-6.

(6) See “Explaining Explanation”.

# KIERKEGAARD AND SOCRATES

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[http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_117.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_117.html)]

## PREFATORY NOTE

On November 11, 2005, one hundred and fifty years will have passed since the death of Søren Kierkegaard at the age of 42. Kierkegaard's philosophy dissertation was entitled "On the Concept of Irony with constant reference to Socrates". He may have seen himself as continuing the Socratic mission of freeing people of passively received dogmas and making them turn inwards into themselves. But in this paper I find more contrasts than similarities between these two differently exceptional personalities. I try to bring out this contrast, or rather opposition, by examining Kierkegaard's exposition of his notion of the "teleological suspension of the ethical." But first let us try to get an overview of the intricate relations between their outlooks.

## KIERKEGAARD AND SOCRATES

Greek thought and Hebrew thought do not make a good mix. Christianity of course is such a mix and that is one source, perhaps the major source, of its difficulties. You can either think in Greek terms or in Hebrew terms without experiencing internal discord, but when you try to weld the two together you cannot be true to yourself all the way through; at some point you have either

to forget about the rationality of Greek thought or throw overboard the sanctified presuppositions of Hebrew thought. Kierkegaard, like many old and present-day theologians and Christian thinkers, was trapped between the horns of this dilemma, but unlike many who found themselves in that predicament, Kierkegaard was unhesitant in his willingness to sacrifice the rationality.

That is why Kierkegaard, while seeking to emulate Socrates, could not proceed Socratically. Socrates sought to free people of received preconceptions by examining, disentangling, clarifying ideas, by shedding a flood of light. Kierkegaard sought to pull people out of their quiescent, lukewarm acceptance of dogma by shocking them. As Professor William McDonald puts it, “He used irony, parody, satire, humor, and deconstructive techniques in order to make conventionally accepted forms of knowledge and value untenable.”(1) But when he made ‘conventionally accepted forms of knowledge and value untenable’ his intention was not that people should discard them but that they should hold them with heightened fervency. He did not want people to reject dogma but to hold it in ‘fear and trembling’.

The title of Chapter II of Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, “The Subjective Truth; Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity”, sounds so deceptively Socratic that we may be excused if we are shocked by the revelation that the positions of the two men are in fact totally opposed. While both Socrates and Kierkegaard found the proper being of humans in subjectivity, the subjectivity Socrates valued was a subjectivity of reason, its essence was intelligibility, while the subjectivity of Kierkegaard was a subjectivity of feeling, its essence was a state of agitation. He asserts that “passion is the culmination of existence for an existing individual”, and again that “passion is also the highest expression of subjectivity.”(2)

## KIERKEGAARD’S PROJECTS

Kierkegaard sought to rescue Christians from the tepidness, the superficiality, and the matter-of-fact adherence that is the bane of institutionalized religions. On this point his position was unequivocal: “If

one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol.”(3)

He wanted to restore individuals to their individuality. Hence his watchword was “become who you are”, which we may designate as his version of the Apollonic/Socratic *gnôthi sauton*.

## KIERKEGAARD AND MYSTICISM

Although Kierkegaard saw his work as a continuation of Socrates’ mission to free people of thralldom to unexamined preconceptions and received notions, he stopped short of questioning the tenets of Christian theology. His contemporaries may have seen his positions as unorthodox and it pleased him to make a show of his unorthodoxy, perhaps the better to assert his individuality, yet he was too deeply immersed in traditional doctrine to shed away its basic tenets. The unreasonableness of those tenets rather than affording ground for their overthrow was seen as a virtue, heightening the intensity of the sentiment engendered by the desperate, blind grasping at nothingness. This is perhaps more akin to the drug-addict’s grasping at the phantom of bliss than to the mystic groping for an undefinable, unfathomable something. The mystic’s experience comes closest to pure subjectivity; Kierkegaard’s paradoxical faith mars the subjectivity by reaching out towards an unreachable heaven.

With Kierkegaard, in place of the mystic identification with the ultimate source we have a constant assertion of the otherness of the power which constitutes the self. Since Kierkegaardian faith is neither the experience of mystic identification nor the self-evidence of phronetic intelligibility, it has repetitively to be renewed in anxiety, fear, and trembling.

## KIERKEGAARD AND EXISTENTIALISM

Kierkegaard's purpose was to shock Christians into revitalizing their faith. It was his representation of the religious experience as an inward passionate anxiety that earned him the title of "father of existentialism" and that led to the re-assertion of the connection between philosophy and life, a connection which had often been lost sight of and which has now once more been obliterated in many professional and academic circles.

Unfortunately, Kierkegaard's emphasis on the inwardness of the spiritual life was clouded and marred by entanglement with Kierkegaard's acceptance of the Christian dogma and by the consequent insistence on the absurdity and paradoxicality of faith. I suggest that, if Kierkegaard could have broken free of the fetters of dogma, he would have arrived at a purer conception of faith as the immediacy of spiritual inwardness.

## KIERKEGAARD AND DOGMA

The assertion of the absolute transcendence of God was pivotal to Kierkegaard's position, but what is that but to equate God with the area of our ignorance? If God is what I don't know and can never know, then what is he to me? At most the illusion of somehow knowing something that I know I don't know. And it is this illusion that is meant to give us the intense subjective feeling of knowing what is unknown and unknowable: the height of absurdity, but then absurdity is just what Kierkegaard was after. "Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty." (4) In Professor McDonald's succinct formulation,

"Christian faith, for Kierkegaard, is not a matter of learning dogma by rote. It is a matter of the individual repeatedly renewing h/er passionate subjective relationship to an object which can never be known, but only believed in. The belief is offensive to reason, since it only exists in the face of the absurd (the paradox of the eternal, immortal, infinite God being incarnated in time as a finite mortal)." (5)

Let us try to understand what is supposed to lie outside the sphere of understanding. Christian faith, we are told, is a matter of a passionate subjective relationship to an object which can never be known: yet that which ‘can never be known’ is distinctly presented in that closing parenthetical clause: the eternal, infinite God incarnated in time as a finite mortal. All of Kierkegaard’s circuitous subterfuges end in the requirement to embrace unquestioningly this absurdity not in spite of its absurdity but precisely because of its absurdity. Kierkegaard never wanted to free us of dogma: he was opposed to ‘learning dogma by rote’ but he was all for imbibing dogma with our eyes wide open.

## THE TELEOLOGICAL SUSPENSION OF THE ETHICAL

To give some substance to my generalities I will comment briefly on Kierkegaard’s examination in *Fear and Trembling* of the question “Is There Such a Thing as a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?”(6)

In advancing the notion of the “teleological suspension of the ethical” Kierkegaard’s immediate target was the refutation of Hegelianism. Following the plan he devised for that purpose, Kierkegaard (in the persona of Johannes de Silentio) starts from Hegel’s definition of the ethical as the universal and of the single individual as a “moral form of evil”, and proceeds to show that, on these terms, Hegel had to condemn Abraham as a murderer. This conclusion would, according to Kierkegaard, be absurd. Why absurd? Because ‘correct’ Christian doctrine tells us to revere Abraham as the “father of faith”. We have to choose between Hegelian rationalism and justifying Abraham by faith. In his treatment of this question, Kierkegaard provides a most flagrant example of the utter sottishness we can fall into when we allow ourselves to be enslaved by a given theology.

After distinguishing clearly between the tragic acts of Agamemnon in sacrificing his daughter, Jephthah, also sacrificing his daughter, and Brutus, ordering the execution of his son, on the one hand, and Abraham’s sacrificing his son, on the other hand, and after arguing that Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus, all remain ‘within the ethical’ and that there is no



‘teleological suspension of the ethical’ in their case, he goes on to justify the act of Abraham. (Parenthetically I would say that ranging Jephthah along with Agamemnon and Brutus as a tragic hero is an enormity: I cannot see how Jephthah can be said to remain ‘within the ethical’,<sup>(7)</sup> but I will not go out of my way to discuss this point at length.)

Kierkegaard asks, “Why then did Abraham do it?”, and he answers, “For God’s sake and (in complete identity with this) for his own sake. He did it for God’s sake because God required this proof of his faith; for his own sake he did it in order that he might furnish the proof.” I must confess I find no sense in this. Why would God ‘require this proof of Abraham’s faith’? Could he not find a less barbarous test? And if he could not, and allowing that his omniscience failed him in just this one instance, could he not opt for giving the man the benefit of the doubt instead of putting him to this cruel test? And why would Abraham find it so important to furnish the proof? To find favour in the eyes of God? To earn the rewards of subservient obedience? Prometheus proved himself nobler than Zeus; why could not Abraham aspire to that kind of nobility?

Kierkegaard continues, “Here is evident the necessity of a new category if one would understand Abraham. Such a relationship to the deity paganism did not know. The tragic hero does not enter into any private relationship with the deity, but for him the ethical is the divine ...” He concludes: “The story of Abraham contains therefore a teleological suspension of the ethical. As the individual he became higher than the universal: this is the paradox which does not permit of mediation.” And this is faith as Kierkegaard understands it, an absurd paradox or a paradoxical absurdity.

The final conclusion of Kierkegaard’s discussion of the teleological suspension of the ethical is that faith transcends the ethical. Here we find the final and ineradicable contradiction between the position of Kierkegaard and that of Socrates. In the *Euthyphro* Socrates poses the question: Is what is righteous righteous because it is favoured by the gods or is it favoured by the gods because it is righteous? Although the *Euthyphro* does not spell it out, the Socratic answer rings loud and clear in the works of Plato as a whole and finds its clearest expression in the *Republic*: the Idea of the Good is the fount

of all reality, all truth, and all value.

Kierkegaard advances the category of the 'religious' as a new category, a category higher than the ethical, not known to the Greeks or to Hegel. In fact it is nothing but the naïve 'piety' of the soothsayer Euthyphro that Socrates finds unsatisfactory, piety as that which is pleasing to the gods.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Sin and guilt loom large in Kierkegaard's thought. It is the sense of sin that instils in us the idea of the transcendent God towards whom we are 'always in the wrong', and it is the anxiety arising from our consciousness of guilt that impels us to seek salvation by the absurdity of faith.

Kierkegaard holds that the life-work which God judges in a person is that person's fulfilment of the task of becoming a true self. This would constitute a very fine philosophy indeed – and it has in fact been a source of inspiration to many(8) – except that for Kierkegaard that fulfilment could only be achieved through that necessarily absurd faith which alone secured salvation.

Kierkegaard's theoretical position was largely a reaction against Hegelianism. Against Hegel's hubristic logicalism Kierkegaard set up the irrationality of a paradoxical faith. Saner than either was Socrates' rationalism that valued understanding freed of the illusion of knowledge. Kierkegaard discovered the deceptiveness of the dream that promised to lead humanity to its highest goals (however defined) through scientific knowledge. Had he been more consistently Socratic he might have spared us something of the scientism that in our day poses as the sole way to understanding.

## Footnotes

(1) McDonald, William, "Søren Kierkegaard", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2005 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

(2) *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton, 1944.

- (3) *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.
- (4) *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.
- (5) McDonald, William, "Søren Kierkegaard", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2005 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).
- (6) "Is There Such a Thing as a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?"  
(reproduced in *Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion*, edd. Daniel J. Bronstein and Harold M. Schulweis, New York, 1954).
- (7) See Book of Judges, 11.
- (8) See, for instance, Richard Schain, *In Love With Eternity*, 2005, passim.

## THE NEED FOR SPIRITUALITY

A marginal note on: I. 'The Possibility of God: An Essay in the Philosophy of Religion' by John Paolini  
[http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_42.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_42.html) , and II. 'The (Im)Possibility of (Desire of) God: a Response to John Paolini' by Brian Tee  
[http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_41.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_41.html), Issue number 51 of *Philosophy Pathways*.

I was charmed by the humane, feeling, and insightful essay of John Paolini, whose searching, candid words speak directly to the heart. But in the end he leaves us with the unanswered question, What is this God we yearn for and where do we find him? On the other hand, I have to confess that I find Brian Tee's adversative approach uninspiring.

The vital question we have to face is, How can we rescue the spirituality we seem to be losing with the loss of traditional faith in established religions?

When Hume taught us that 'is' does not yield 'ought', we had need of Kant to reinstate the balance. Kant regained for us the 'ought' – without which there can be no *kosmos* (in the original Greek sense) – in Reason: pure, yielding logical necessity; practical, yielding moral obligation; judgemetic, yielding aesthetic value.

But empiricism in its various guises – positivism, naturalism, physicalism, scientism – seeing that 'ought' is not to be found in the objective world,

simply jettisoned it and was content with 'what is'. We were left to choose between supernaturalists marketing their various brands of God on the one hand and naturalists and secular humanists on the other hand telling us that we have no need for anything beyond 'what is'. (That is why I felt it necessary to oppose Quine's "On What There Is" in my essay "On What Is Real".)

I hold that this is a phantom dilemma, that we have a third viable option. We need spirituality if we are to realize the full potential of our humanity, and we can have that spirituality without institutionalized religion.

The ideas and ideals, the dreams and flights of imagination, that constitute the spiritual life of humankind, are realities in the intelligible realm, and that spiritual life itself is our reality. As a mutable being, ceaselessly flowing from moment to moment and from one state of transient existence to another, I am only half-real, or only real by sufferance; but in creative thought, in deeds of love, in the awesome sense of beauty as I cry with Wordsworth, "My heart leaps up when I behold / A rainbow in the sky", I am truly real. And that reality is not epiphenomenal, or accidental, or a figure of speech; it is all we know of reality and all the reality we know. It is the objective world with all its appearances and all its happenings that is an adjunct to this reality, not the other way round. This is the truth we lost when empiricism and cynicism combined led us to lose faith in idealism; and this is the truth we need to regain if human life is not to be a tale "Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing".

## IS THERE MIND IN NATURE?

The ever escalating heat of the Creationist-Darwinist polemics, patterned, on both sides, on the worst kind of factional fanaticism, is doing great damage to rationalism and freedom of thought. Neither party shows any readiness to stop for a moment to say, I may not have the whole truth on my side. Either all design, all purpose, all mind is brought into the world of nature from on high or there is no design, no purpose, and no mind at all in the world of nature. Either Jehovah has revealed it all or Darwin has revealed it all, and there is no more question. They do not reason but wrangle, either party loudly proclaiming they hold the absolute truth captured for all time in a holy book, whether it be the Bible or *The God Illusion*.

In this short note however I do not intend to discuss the question at length. I reserve that task for a future paper where I hope to examine some more fruitful approaches such as that suggested by the Aristotelean notion of entelechy, by Bergson's concept of creative evolution, by Whitehead's philosophy of organism and process. Here I simply offer some rambling thoughts on the subject.

Daniel Dennett, for instance, sees "humans, the human soul and culture as natural products of the primordial soup." In this deceptively simple statement there are at least three dangerously ambiguous terms – 'natural', 'product', 'primordial', leaving alone the metaphorical 'soup' in which one can easily drown – which naturally produce their own primordial haze that

must be made more distinct if we are to think a little more clearly.

It is so unfortunate that the notion of ‘intelligent design’ has been kidnapped by creationists and tied to the carriage of monotheistic revelation. The notion certainly deserved better, for it can justly claim a worthy ancestry from the *Logos* of Heraclitus and the *Nous* of Anaxagoras through the Aristotelean *Entelechy* to the Will and Idea of Schopenhauer. Creationists, by pitting intelligent design against evolution in an either-or contest, have made it possible for Darwinists (who in turn confusingly conflate Darwinism with the basic notion of evolution) to claim that, since it can be shown by empirical evidence that evolution is a fact, we can forget about intelligence and purposiveness in the processes of nature. This does as much wrong to the scientific evolutionary concept as to the philosophical concept of inherent creative intelligence and inherent purposiveness in all becoming.

Evolution (Darwinian or non-Darwinian) is a scientific theory (not in the corrupt sense of ‘theory’ forged by the creationists but in the sense in which all scientific findings are theoretical) that gives an objective account of phenomenal happenings. Science tells us How, it never tells us Why. When certain scientists say that science ‘explains’ things, this only shows that their minds are innocent of the wondering Why: for them to explain is simply to show how; that is all they are interested in. Newton did not think that his theory and his equations explain why things behave as they do; nor did Einstein. But the unreasonable (I have more than once been chided for using stronger words) controversy wants to force us to choose between a whimsical creator taking it into its head to fabricate a world out of nothing and the equally absurd idea of an inert, lifeless, mindless something also suddenly taking it into its head to start moving and developing.

So once again I find it necessary to reiterate what I have been maintaining in my writings, that the failure to distinguish between the radically different roles and spheres of science and philosophy is damaging to both science and philosophy. Thus here we find ourselves required to make the sorry choice between saving intelligence in the universe by accepting the arbitrary authority of revealed religion, and vainly seeking to save our own intelligence by resting content with something mindless and lifeless as what

is ultimately real. But we need not be reduced to that sad choice. Science, and only science, is entitled and able to give us an account of how things are and how they have come to be as they are, and that account remains valid until science has a – by its own criteria – better account to give. At the same time, poetry and philosophy and art (yes, these belong together in one family) are entitled and able to give us a vision through which we find meaning and value in the world and in ourselves. Can that vision be true? If we take the notion of truth as meaning that which conforms to things as they are objectively, which reports what is the case, then the notion of truth is inapplicable to the creative vision of poetry/philosophy/art whose reality is inherent and self-contained. That vision is meaningful and as meaningful constitutes the reality we live in as intelligent beings. That is all we have, all we can have, and all we need to have.

Philosophers must learn humility from poets, though poets are with justice a very proud race. Poets do not bother to say that their visions have any truth or validity outside themselves. Philosophers too should refrain from the attempt to assert that their visions and principles apply to the world outside. Their visions and principles are true of the only real world they know. They should be content with that. The Unknowable is unknowable and that's that. The only *noumenon* we know is our own inner reality. The *noumenon* of the world is our idea. To match our idea of the *noumenon* of the world with the *noumenon* of the world we have to be outside the world and inside the world at the same time, which is nonsensical.

Creationists and the advocates of the new-fangled Intelligent Design doctrine place all intelligence outside us and reduce us to miserable beggars depending for all intelligence and all understanding on dole. Materialists, Darwinists, and their tribe, when they step out of their proper place as scientists and parade as philosophers, banish all intelligence and all mystery and give us a world that is pale and stale.

Permit me to conclude these thoughts by reproducing an excerpt from the supplementary part of my latest book, *Hypatia's Lover*, giving an imaginary answer of Hypatia's to an imaginary question.



“From Hypatia’s answers to students’ questions:

“Is there mind in the cosmos, in the world we see around us? This is a question which only a fool would rush to answer confidently. Plato told us in the *Sophist* about the ongoing battle of the Gods and the Giants. The Giants would make even of the mind in us a phantom thing not worthy of being dignified with the title of reality. The Gods see mind as the root and source and ground of reality. Now, I am no goddess of course, but you all know that I side with the philosophical Gods. To my mind the notion of a thing, any thing, existing apart from mind, is unintelligible. I cannot see how a thing that is not rooted in mind can be.

“But in what sense is there mind in things that we call material? In what sense is there mind in a rock, in a log of wood, in a manufactured article? These are intricate questions about which we can speculate endlessly. Here I would only explain that when I say that I cannot see how there can be anything apart from mind, I am not referring to mind as we habitually know it in ourselves. Mind as we habitually know it in ourselves is conditioned by the limitations and special circumstances of human life. And most manifestations of mind in our normal life and normal experience do not represent what we should see as most valuable or most real in us. Skill and shrewdness and even praiseworthy ingenuity are not what is best and happiest in us.

“But mind, or, as I prefer to say, intelligence, is to me an inseparable aspect of life, of creativity, of what is real. So, while I say that, theoretically, I cannot see how there can be a rock that is not grounded in mind, I yet confess that I have no notion as to how mind is related to the rock. But I can say with more confidence that I feel there is mind in a flower or a bee in the same sense as there is mind in our best moments of tranquility and of happiness. And I have to explain that when I speak of mind in the bee I do not mean the amazing abilities of the bee that put our best skills to shame, but I mean the intelligence inherent in its sheer vitality.

“I know that my thoughts on this subject are vague and nebulous and in need of development and clarification, but not more so – I unhesitatingly say –

than my thoughts on any other subject, the only difference being that, on the other subjects, I employ terms and notions that seem sensible to you because they sound familiar. But in truth, if we are not to delude ourselves, we must confess that all our theoretical thinking is of necessity always vague and nebulous, in need of constant examination, clarification, and re-formulation. When we forget this, we fall into the gross and deadly delusion of thinking ourselves in possession of final, definitive truth. This, after all, is the core message of the Socratic elenchus and of Plato's conception of dialectic.

"I have said this before and I feel it bears repetition. When any of you puts to me any question, I hope that the questioner may never be under the delusion of expecting me to give a true answer. A question for which there can be a true answer is foreign to philosophy. A philosophical question is an invitation, an incitation, to reflection, to the clarification of our own thoughts. If you want true answers, go to the artisans, or go to the theologians! All their answers are absolutely true, even when they are absolutely contradictory! When you ask me a question, then whatever I may say – at least that's what I hope – I am not giving you an answer but am inciting you to look into your own mind."(1)

(1) From *Hypatia's Lover*, 2006, pp.153-7.

## KANT AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT PROMISE

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[http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_72.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_72.html)]

The 12th February 2004 marks the bicentenary of the death of Immanuel Kant, who may justly be regarded as an incarnation of the Enlightenment. Were Kant to come back into our world today, how would he view what has become of the promise of that glorious movement?

In 1784 Kant gave an answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?” In giving that answer Kant was in the first place concerned to distinguish between the practical need to obey the laws and institutions of society, necessary for maintaining peace and stability, on the one hand, and the freedom of thought, the right of the individual to question and criticize those very laws and institutions in public, absolutely necessary for human progress, on the other hand. Most of what Kant says in that context may now be of historical interest only (if we leave out of account those areas of the world where freedom of thought is still anathema). But at one point Kant draws a seminal distinction between an age of enlightenment and an enlightened age.

“If we are asked, Do we now live in an enlightened age?, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment. As things now

stand, we still have a long way to go before men can be or can easily become capable of correctly using their own reason in religious matters with assurance, without outside guidance. But we do have clear indications that the way is now being cleared for men to work freely in this direction, and that the obstacles to general enlightenment, to man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity, are gradually becoming fewer."

Perhaps, writing at a time when intellectual Europe was living in the euphoria of the ideals of freedom and rationalism, Kant was over-optimistic. Yet he was clear-sighted and perceptive enough to realize that, much as it was gratifying to see the good work accomplished by the great British, French, and German thinkers, and the liberalizing reforms introduced by Frederick the Great (to whom Kant's article paid deserved homage), the fulfilment of an enlightened age was a far-off goal.

During the twentieth century the hopes and dreams that were generated in the preceding two centuries were dissipated. Today, two hundred years after Kant departed our world, we cast a look on the condition of humankind, a humankind that, by the lights of eighteenth-century enlightenment and nineteenth-century progressivism, should by now have become united in peace, goodwill, and prosperity — and what do we see? It is hardly necessary to give an account: intolerance, conflict, violence, poverty, and disease not only reign in the vast backward regions but are also evident in what might be termed the bright spots of the advanced world.

But bad as it is that we have failed to make good on the promise, it is a far worse calamity that we seem to have lost the beacon that signals the way. During the twentieth century mainstream philosophy lost its bearings. Seduced by the spectacular theoretical and practical successes of the objective sciences into thinking that the methods and criteria of those sciences were the only means to truth, philosophers sought to apply those same methods and criteria to questions relating to the meaning of life and the values that give meaning to life. Philosophy, especially the Analytical

species prevalent in the English-speaking world, was broken up into specialized disciplines and fragmented into particular problems, all swayed and impregnated by scientism, reductionism, and relativism. All questions of meaning and value were consigned to the rubbish heap of ‘metaphysical nonsense’.

On the other hand, religion, seemingly the only remaining shelter for meanings and values, continued to tether these meanings and values to irrational beliefs that enslave the mind and play a divisive role between peoples. Humanity was thus left to the mercy of the Scylla of amoral science and technology on the one hand and the Charybdis of dogmatic religion on the other hand. The option we were offered was: either science and no values or values bound up with what Kant called self-imposed immaturity. The ruinous abdication by philosophy of its rightful domain is the consequence of the oblivion of philosophers to a great insight first beheld clearly by Socrates and re-affirmed by Kant as by no other philosopher. Science, concerned solely and exclusively with objective existents, cannot give answers to questions about meanings and values. Only ideas engendered by the mind and to be found nowhere but in the mind (Socrates), only the pure transcendental forms supplied by reason (Kant), can secure the ideals and values and put us in touch with the realities that constitute our moral and spiritual life. Twenty-four centuries after Socrates, two centuries after Kant, we badly need to re-learn the lesson.

Kant’s “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” was published in the *Berlinische Monatschrift* for December 1784. An English translation can be accessed at: <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/kant.html>

## GIORDANO BRUNO AND THE DREAM OF HUMANISM

(This article appeared first in February 2005 in the Giordano Bruno site – [www.giordanobruno.info](http://www.giordanobruno.info) – and subsequently in Philosophy Pathways.)

It is not my intention to give an exposition of Bruno's thought. That is a task that I willingly leave to those who are better equipped to perform it.

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) was a lover of myth, allegory, and symbol, and knew full well the power of those magical wands to reveal and illumine where discursive thought hid and obscured. In this short note I treat of Bruno himself as an emblem of the mystic paths that lead to the inner reality of our being.

Bruno was the epitome of his age, an age of intellectual and spiritual ferment, an age when science and mysticism walked hand in hand, an age which saw the birth of humanism. He is a true paradigm of the whole human being that our contemporary fractured and fragmented humanity stands badly in need of — a fractured and fragmented humanity where religion is indissolubly wedded to dogmatism and superstition and where rationality is blindly bound to soulless physicalism.

Yet Bruno has not yet received the attention that his profundity and originality make his rightful due; the reason being that he is in the unenviable position of his thought being opposed simultaneously to religious dogmatism and scientific materialism — the two dominant trends that

polarize modern culture and condemn it to one-sidedness and insularity.

This is compounded by the difficulties of Bruno's style of writing. Giorgio de Santillana, who gives a balanced and sympathetic outline of Bruno's thought in *The Age of Adventure* (1956), writes, "He is not one of those minds which shed a pure and equable light to reveal a new landscape of ideas; with the fire of his temperament there went a good deal of smoke" (p.244).

In my view, what might be seen as the lack of clear-cut distinctness in Bruno's thought should be appreciated as a merit rather than denigrated as a defect. The fecund nebulousity of his thought poses a wholesome challenge and offers a corrective to the shallowness and insipidity of our thoughtless religiosity and our insightless scientism at once. Plato found that the profoundest philosophical insights are essentially ineffable and can only be expressed in myth and allegory. Our learned scholars mutilate Plato's best insights when they exert themselves to force his thought into well-defined theories and fixed doctrines. In the myth of Actaeon in Bruno's *Heroici Furori* (*Heroic Exaltations*) we have a profounder and more truthful insight into the living substance of Platonism expressed symbolically and allegorically.

Giordano Bruno was a living incarnation of the pristine ideal of humanism — which, alas!, through various metamorphoses, has been drained of its true essence by being splintered into the diverse, mutually contradictory present-day 'humanisms' that reflect the fragmentation of modern humanity. Today Secular Humanism murders the soul of humanism while its antithesis, Christian Humanism, drags the mind back into the stranglehold of unquestioning dogmatism and superstition. It is this split that lends credence to the spurious opposition of faith and reason which is nowadays regarded as an irreconcilable Either-Or, while the reconciliation is ready to hand if only we are willing to go back to the wholeness of the perennial philosophy of which Bruno's philosophy — as much as Plato's or Plotinus's or Spinoza's — is an original, creative expression.

Bruno's humanism is evident equally in his siding with Erasmus in his defence of free will and in his opposition to Martin Luther's '*pecca fortiter*'.

Bruno would certainly have supported Pelagius against Augustine.

In his exchanges with the Inquisition during his long drawn-out trial, he did not hedge, dissemble, or prevaricate. While hoping to vindicate his position as consistent with faith in the divinity (goodness and intelligence) of ultimate Reality, he was not intimidated by the imminent threat of death into redacting his views to conform to accepted doctrine. He was trying to make the Inquisition appreciate that his position was rational and religiously sound, not to convince them that he conformed to established doctrine. This was as honest as Socrates' attempt to make his judges understand that he believed in God according to his lights. Throughout the proceedings, he sought to vindicate himself without compromising his integrity. But when it came to the brunt, he refused to submit. He chose to die rather than be false to his inner light.

Bruno's insistence that the views he expounded were meant 'strictly on the philosophical plane' implies that the doctrines formulated by the Church were no more than a 'popular' version that did no harm when taken as such but that should not preclude a profounder philosophical understanding. De Santillana writes, "One cannot but respect the scrupulousness of the Inquisition, which took eight years to make up its mind that the doctrine, however acceptable its religious content, could not be reconciled with dogma" (*op. cit.*, p.250). But then, that is just the point. Bruno had no desire to disturb the belief of simple folk in dogma which gave them comfort. But he would not allow such dogma to block philosophical probing for a profounder understanding.

The Inquisition could not accept such a live-and-let-live policy. Can we? Unless at least the more intelligent members of society understand and acknowledge unequivocally that such dogma is no more than myth and must in no way be taken as literal truth and that intelligent persons are not only allowed to, but are required to, criticize and disclose the error of such dogma and introduce new formulations making for a better understanding — unless the intelligent sector of society openly and firmly adopt that attitude, then such dogma will be an instrument of bondage and a means of exploitation and extortion. We hardly need any explication or illustration of the truth of



this. Our world is boiling and seething with the collision of opposed creeds and dogmata.

Yet, we cannot simply shove aside all myth and live in a world governed by cold calculations of expediency and utility, a world void of ultimate principles and absolute values. We need the symbolism, the inspirational whisperings of myth and allegory, of poetry and fiction, to keep us alive to the reality of the inner fount of our true being and true worth, and we need the free untrammelled speculative activity of intelligence without which those life-giving myths turn into fossilized and fossilizing superstitions. That is why we need the spirit and the message of Giordano Bruno to help us retrieve our lost human integrity.

In the dialogue *de l'Infinito Universo e Mondi* (of the Infinity of the Universe and of the Worlds) we read of “the earth, our divine mother who has borne us and nourished us and at last will take us back into her bosom.” Would we not be less likely to pollute and damage our environment if we could think in those terms?

The ignorance, prejudice, and hatred that Bruno had to confront in his lifetime are still hounding his memory. It seems that there are many quarters where it is felt that Bruno’s call for humans to look for truth and reality within their own souls still threatens empires of dogmatic creeds and fossilized doctrines. As evidence of this, I will here review briefly an article, “The Folly of Giordano Bruno”, by Professor W. Pogge of Ohio State University, (<http://www.setileague.org/editor/brunoalt.htm>), which sadly shows little interest in and no understanding of Bruno’s seminal ideas and enlightening approach, but concentrates instead on denigrating the man and absolving the Church of blame! That Pogge is an Astronomist may perhaps explain the curious slant of his article but it cannot excuse the vituperative ire with which he handles his subject — as if Professor Pogge were convinced that Bruno deserved to be burned for failing to make much of a contribution to Astronomy!

Professor Pogge chooses as motto for his article the following words of Paul Valery: “The folly of mistaking paradox for a discovery, a metaphor for proof, a torrent of verbiage for a spring of capital truths, and oneself for an

oracle, is inborn in us.” This is revealing. Those who seek understanding outside their own minds, whether in the evidence of the senses or in the dictates of extraneous authority do not have eyes for the inner realities of the soul. It is no wonder that Professor Pogge finds Bruno’s writings are “of only academic interest to us today”. Eternal realities and perennial insights that can only spring from the founts of the creative mind and can only be conveyed in myth and symbol cannot be beheld by those who do not have eyes for the invisible.

Professor Pogge is keen on ‘correcting’ the “popular accounts” which say that Bruno was condemned for his Copernicanism and portray him “as a martyr to free thought”. He affirms that “we do not actually know the exact grounds of his conviction on charges of heresy.” Further on he suggests that “the Church’s complaint with Bruno was theological not astronomical.” In other words, he was condemned because he held views different from those held by the Church and considered it his duty to stand by what he saw as the truth. If that doesn’t make one “a martyr to free thought”, what does?

Pogge goes to great lengths to argue that Bruno’s work “had little to do with astronomy”; that he was not condemned for his Copernicanism; that the Church did not express an official opinion on Copernicanism until after Bruno’s death. Which is all beside the point!

Pogge’s principal objection to Bruno is directed to his Pantheism, which Pogge construes as opposing “the Church’s emphasis on spiritualism with an unapologetic and all-encompassing materialism.” Pogge thus equates Pantheism with Materialism! I only wish it were so: we could then perhaps hope that materialists would see the spiritual reality underlying and upholding all matter.

The bulk of the rest of Pogge’s article is devoted to maintaining that Bruno’s “peregrinations around Europe ... had less to do with his being hounded by the Inquisition as it did with his rather difficult personality.” He exerts himself to blacken Bruno’s character and concludes: “In many ways, Bruno thrust himself into the flames that rose into the winter skies of the Campo di Fiori on the 17th day of February in 1600.” I cannot help sensing in the tone of this sentence a touch of malicious glee!

## WAS KEATS A FOOL?

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[http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_92.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_92.html)]

Clever pundits dismiss with a condescending smile Keats' simplicity when he says

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

In this note I suggest that Keats' inspired statement is not mere soul-lifting poetical rhetoric, but encapsulates profound metaphysical insight. I do not intend to develop this suggestion here adequately. That is something I hope to do some other time. Here I merely sketch an outline for the benefit of whomever may wish to ponder it. In other words, this note is offered frankly and simply as a provocation.

The perfect model (I am allergic to the term ‘paradigm’) of indubitable truth is the axiom which rests in its own self-evidence, needing no external grounding and admitting no proof. Euclidean geometry is based on such axioms. That we now know that alternative axioms to those of Euclidean geometry are equally admissible and equally, or more, serviceable, does not invalidate the older ones. It only shows that our conception of truth has to be broadened. The whole of Spinoza's majestic metaphysical system rests on eight definitions and seven axioms taken as self-evident. That Spinoza's

system has been taken to pieces by critics signifies no more than does the dethronement of Euclidean axioms. It only shows that our conception of metaphysical truth has to be revised.

The notion of truth has been a bone of contention in modern and contemporary philosophy simply because each of the contending philosophers works with her/his own narrowly defined conception of truth. But we would be gravely wronging Keats if we reduced his inspired dictum to a 'theory of truth'.

Factual truth is a strictly limited variety of truth and (notwithstanding the fact that it almost monopolizes the term in modern usage) is the least significant philosophically. Of more philosophical significance is the truth exemplified in a great symphony or a good film. This is the truth of beauty: metaphysical truth is more akin to this.

Socrates, in the 'autobiographical' section of the *Phaedo* gives expression to a fundamental insight which, in my view, philosophers have not yet absorbed. Socrates presents the core of that insight in a truly oracular pronouncement:

It is apparent to me, that if there is anything beautiful other than the-beautiful-itself, it is for no other reason beautiful than that it shares of that beauty. ... If anyone tells me that anything whatever is beautiful by having a delightful colour or shape or anything else of the kind, I take leave of all that (for I get lost with such things), telling myself simply and solely, and perhaps foolishly, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of beauty. (*Phaedo*, 100c-d.)

I have repeatedly quoted and commented in my writings on the whole of the rich passage in which this statement occurs. Suffice it here to say that my interpretation, or my rendering if you will, of this insight is that the self-evidence of the intelligible form – engendered by the mind and to be found nowhere but in the mind – is the hallmark of philosophical truth: that self-evidence is of an essentially aesthetic nature.

I believe that in speaking of truth Keats must have had in mind what Plato meant by *alêtheia*. Throughout his works but principally in the *Republic*, Plato emphasizes the identity of *alêtheia*, *ousia*, and *to on*. In the *Symposium* Diotima delineates the progress from the experience of one beautiful object upwards to the vision of the Idea of Beauty. A beautiful object, then, as an embodiment of a particular perfection in intelligible immediacy is a unique expression of reality. As such it is truth in the only metaphysically significant sense of the word.

## DUALISM AND MONISM: A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

I will begin with a statement which many will find shocking: There has never been and there can never be an agreed, uniform, standard terminology in philosophy. The reason for this is that philosophy is not, and it is not in its nature to be, a science. Philosophy is a never-ending exercise of contemplating the inexhaustible and strictly ineffable reality of our inward being. In giving expression to that inexhaustible and ineffable reality philosophy must ever create new concepts and clothe those new concepts in new language.

If we were absolutely free, unembodied spirits, that would be the whole truth of the matter. But we are not. We are imperfect human beings living together in a common world and need to communicate with each other and be understood by each other. We need a language that is not completely originaive, as the ideal language of philosophy or of poetry would be if we were free spirits, but is a language with some measure of fixity and some degree of uniformity. But we should not make the mistake of thinking this a step in the direction of what is best. Our aim should not be ever to achieve more fixity and uniformity; rather we should gladly welcome loosening the fixity and disturbing the uniformity. And yet the contingent necessities of our imperfect nature must be addressed. Let this be my excuse for the following note.

I have often felt that the usage of the terms ‘dualism’ and ‘monism’ in contemporary philosophical discussions calls for clarification. Some of my

friends, with whom I stand on common ground with regard to certain important philosophical questions, describe themselves as dualists and, when counting me on their side, have called me a dualist. I find this confusing and, to me personally (if you will excuse the egotism), irritating.

I cannot accept the dualism we meet with in the Aristotelean misrepresentation of Platonic idealism or in Descartes' separation of mind and body any more than I can accept the dualism represented by primitive notions of the self. Starting from this dualism, it is impossible to make sense of either mind or body. But the alternative is not the 'monism' which maintains that the body is all there is and that the mind is a gossamer apparition, a delusion. When I insist on the reality of the mind and affirm that the mind is the one reality we know immediately and indubitably, I do not call myself a dualist, for I maintain that there is no mind without objective existence (embodiment) and no objective existence without intelligence, and that only the whole is real. The emphasis I lay on mind is, we may say, moral and not metaphysical or epistemological. I emphasize the reality of mind since I hold that our whole worth and our whole dignity as human beings is in this inner luminescence, this inwardness, this inner sanctuary, that Socrates habitually referred to as that in us which thrives by doing what is right and suffers by doing what is wrong.

I have no intention to legislate for the linguistic usage of these terms. It is enough for me to say that there is a dualism that I find unacceptable and a monism that I find equally objectionable and that while in principle I resent all isms and all labels, I would rather be called a monist than a dualist, but insist that the monism I favour is not the monism of materialists. My position is more in harmony with Spinoza's Pantheism, where God-or-Nature is a single reality, where the one Substance is *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* at once.

## PHILOSOPHICAL LANGUAGE

“... the assertion that you are in falsehood and I am in truth, is the most cruel thing one man can say to another ...” (Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*, XV, tr. Aylmer Maude.)

Philosophers have to convey their thought (or, their insights, as I prefer to put it) in language, and language is, notoriously, a blunt tool. The more philosophers seek to sharpen that tool by creating special terminologies; the more finely they define and redefine their terms; the more artificial and unlikelike their language becomes, the more removed they find themselves from the core of the original inspiration they meant to convey, and the more untrue to the throbbing heart of the living experience they intended to convey. And the predicament does not end there. With the multiplication of terminologies and the refinement of distinctions, the controversies and misunderstandings between different thinkers become more and more confounded. For we delude ourselves if we think that the ‘scholastic quibbling with words’ is behind us; it is as much with us today as it ever was.

The inherent fluidity of language has always been to me an indomitable challenge. In *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008) I found myself obliged to include a “Note on Terminology” to prepare the reader for the shock of my special usage, or rather usages, of the particularly troublesome words



‘knowledge’ and ‘reality’. I began the Note with the words, “If my contentions concerning the nature of philosophical thinking have any validity, then it would follow that philosophical terminology can never attain absolute uniformity.” Somewhere in that book I wrote:

“Words are treacherous. Words, creatures of the mind, jump at every opportunity to lord it over the mind. There is not a single word that one may use unguardedly. Every word holds out a snare, and one must beware of falling into the snares of words. The mind must constantly assert its mastery over words by re-thinking, re-creating all its terms, all its formulations. Otherwise it soon finds itself a slave to the creatures it created to sing its hymns of glory.”

A word has to be understood – and can only be understood – in its proper universe of discourse. An original thinker’s language will inevitably be peculiar to that thinker, being the embodiment of a unique universe of discourse, and can only be understood in a sympathetically imaginative assimilation of that special universe of discourse.

I am currently reading Schleiermacher’s *On Religion* (in the English translation of Richard Crouter, CUP, 1988, 1996: I believe this does not negate the relevance of the following remarks). Schleiermacher finds the seat, the ground, of religion (for me, spirituality) in sense and intuition. In my own writings I shy away from the term ‘intuition’ because it has become encumbered with many conflicting constructions. What Schleiermacher means by sense and intuition corresponds to what I mean by understanding. On the other hand, for Schleiermacher understanding is the death of sense and intuition, and hence of true religion. In my usage that would be not understanding but knowledge as opposed to understanding. Thus going by the letter, Schleiermacher’s position seems to be radically opposed to mine, but in truth I find Schleiermacher’s outlook completely in harmony with my own. The discrepancy in terminology, in this case, is partly contingent and could with some effort be made less glaring if I were to re-write my own text using Schleiermacher’s terminology. But that would not eradicate the basic

peculiarity inherent in each writer's language. Indeed, if I were to dress my thought in Schleiermacher's or Kant's or Whitehead's language (to name only thinkers with whom I have much affinity), that would be more confusing than helpful, because it would blur the specificity of my concepts and thus falsify my special meaning.

Socrates in his trial asks his judges to bear with him if he speaks in his accustomed manner as they would excuse a foreigner who spoke in his native tongue and dialect. As with everything in Plato, we can find here multiple layers of meaning beneath the surface. If we are to understand a thinker – indeed if we are to understand any of our fellow human beings even on the humdrum level of everyday life – we have, in generous open-mindedness, to allow them to speak not merely their own language but indeed their own 'dialect', their peculiar jargon. Else we deny ourselves the truer communion of soul with soul that is akin to the understanding a mother drinks from the eyes of her baby. Alas! Most of the time in reading a philosopher we deprive ourselves of this deeper understanding and are content with collecting the empty husks of dead words.

Aristotle's thought moves in a totally different universe of discourse from that of Plato's. A Platonist finds it difficult to identify with Aristotle's outlook, and the reverse is equally true. But that does not justify either a Platonist or an Aristotelist in thinking the other wrong. Either philosopher (any original philosopher for that matter) presents a panoramic landscape of reality which, to the extent that it has intrinsic coherence, enjoys its own rationality and reveals its proper truth. I as a Platonist have repeatedly spoken harshly of Aristotle, but only when considering Aristotle's negative and unsympathetic evaluations of Plato's positions.

A. N. Whitehead says, "The dogmas of religion are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the religious experience of mankind. In exactly the same way the dogmas of physical science are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the sense-perception of mankind" (*Religion in the Making*, II.ii). In this plain, simple, straightforward explanation of the nature of both religious and scientific dogma Whitehead was not introducing a novel discovery or an abstruse

theory, but was affirming something that should have long been part of the intellectual furniture of every civilized human being. Sadly, even today neither the adherents of religious creeds nor those engaged in scientific activity have yet absorbed this simple truth. (Every time I am compelled to use the word ‘truth’ I shudder at the layers upon layers of conflicting meanings and presuppositions hidden under its deceptive transparency.) Religions assume that their fictions report objective actualities and scientists vainly seek to instal their fictions in place of the actual things they faintly shadow. Scientists and theologians alike endue their words with a sanctity and a finality they are not entitled to assume. They fail to realize that the only reality we know is the reality of the creative mind that produces both the religious metaphor and the scientific abstraction.

Let me seek an illustration in another quarter. Personally I am not comfortable with the current use of the terms ‘dualism’ and ‘monism’. Today monism is equated with materialism or physicalism, while any affirmation of spiritual reality is described as dualism. To me dualism indicates something like the dualism of Descartes who sorted out all reality into two distinct and completely separate substances, or like the dualism implied in the widely accepted and to my mind quite erroneous interpretation of Plato’s so-called ‘Theory of Forms’. When Spinoza revived the integral unity of mind and body in the one ultimate Substance, I would call that monism rather than dualism. In the same way, Socrates’ radical distinction between the intelligible and the sensible which emphasizes and brings into prominence the reality of the intelligible realm is, in my view, consistent with true monism, since, at any rate in my interpretation, the sensible has no reality except under the forms of intelligence, and the intelligible has no actuality except in some perceived instance. — I say all this not to dispute or criticize or seek to reverse the current usage of the terms monism and dualism, but to further illustrate my contention that philosophical terms should always only be understood in the context of the system of thought, of the universe of discourse, of the individual philosopher using the terms.

Why are analytical philosophers continually at each other’s throats? It is

because they cannot rid themselves of the delusion that words have fixed, inalienable, meanings, and that consequently they are speaking the same language. No two persons ever speak the same language. Except for purely abstract tokens drained of all content, every word has for each individual user associations, nuances, reverberations distinct from those it has for any other user. Albert Einstein has somewhere said, "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are uncertain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality." I interpret this as meaning that only purely abstract equations can be precise and formally true. Any statement with some content, with some relation to actuality, is necessarily ambiguous.

Whitehead, one of the most penetrating minds of the first half of the twentieth century, when expressing the profoundest thoughts on ultimate principles, writes as obscurely as Heraclitus. In illustration let me quote a paragraph taken at random from *Religion in the Making*:

"The actual world, the world of experiencing and of thinking, and of physical activity, is a community of many diverse entities; and these entities contribute to, or derogate from, the common value of the total community. At the same time, these actual entities are, for themselves, their own value, individual and separable. They add to the common stock and yet they suffer alone. The world is a scene of solitariness in community." (p.88.)

The statement has the darkness of the deep. Why is this so? It is because Whitehead is trying to give expression to insights of the highest generality in original terms. We can only glimpse the meaning underlying such an expression if we enter into sympathetic communion with the whole web of ideas constituting his special universe of discourse.

Cratylus and Antisthenes in olden times, the early Wittgenstein in modern times, divined the truth that to use language is to falsify reality. The three of them were similarly nonplussed. They lacked the audacity of creative intelligence. The dilemma is real but there is a way out for them that dare

defy the impossible. We, being imperfect, can only speak half-truths; but if we acknowledge our half-truths to be nothing but half-truths, they cease to be falsehoods: they become strivings towards the truth.

Someone might ask, “What’s the upshot of your argument?” In the first place, I would not call it an argument, but an appeal — an appeal for more generosity in dealing with the thought of anyone who seeks to give expression to a point of view. Plato in his dialogues repeatedly draws attention to the difference between genuine discussion aiming at understanding and disputation whose sole purpose is victory in debate. Unfortunately, most philosophical controversy is more akin to the latter. To enrich our philosophical understanding, we need less of critical acumen and more of sympathetic insight.

## IS MORALITY A NATURAL PHENOMENON?

Comment on “Knowing Right and Wrong: Is morality a natural phenomenon?” by Alex Byrne, Boston Review, March/April 2007,  
<http://bostonreview.net/BR32.2/byrne.html> .

Is morality a natural phenomenon? My first reaction to the question (voiced in the following somewhat whimsical lines jotted down before I had read a single word beyond the title) is to feel a little dumb. I don't seem to understand what the question means. Presumably there is such a thing as morality; and we meet with that thing in our world, which, to my understanding is the natural world; *ergo*, morality is a natural phenomenon. Oh! Perhaps the question means: Does morality arise in the natural course of things or could it not have come into the world unless it were introduced from some supernatural source? That would seem to make it a more interesting question. But then I hear the Socrates of the *Euthyphro* asking: Is morality moral because the supernatural source wanted it that way or did the supernatural source opt for it because it is moral? With Socrates I feel that if I were to accept the first alternative I would lose all self-respect. Once that alternative is removed, then however morality may have come about, I find that it is the moral sense that gives me the finest experiences I ever have in life. In the same way, however our enjoyment of beauty in sound and shape may have come about, that enjoyment of beauty is among the most precious treasures that make life worthwhile. [On reading further I found that

Professor Byrne also refers to Socrates' seminal question in the *Euthyphro*.]

Professor Byrne seems to brush aside Kant's well-known remark about "the starry firmament above and the moral law within". I should be very much saddened if my knowledge of the composition of the sun and the distance of the Horsehead Nebula were to expel the sense of sublime awe that I experience at the spectacle of the starry firmament, which, begging Professor Byrne's pardon, is still "above". Above and below are ideas created by the mind and they are real and remain real for the mind.

Professor Byrne writes: "arrange bits of matter a certain way and you have ... a lively lobster" (or, he could have said, a Shakespeare or an Einstein). But the lobster is not "bits of matter". That is the reductionist sleight-of-hand the empiricists play in all innocence. The lobster is a new reality, an original form of being, whose coming into being may be described (= chronicled and reported) but never explained. The only way I can find the coming of the lobster into being intelligible is through the idea of the creativity of Reality or Nature or whatever you may call the First Principle which we have to think of as the ultimate ground and source of all "stuff". We – you and I – are intelligent beings, there is no denying that. And your intelligence and my intelligence have come out of "physical stuff" arranged in a certain way, but this intelligence is not just "stuff". Stuff, matter, neutrons, neurons, quantum, light years, are all creations of the mind: the mind is the reality, the one reality, of which we have immediate knowledge, and yet we turn our back to it and, with Plato's cave captives, seek to find reality in shadows.

Hume's puzzle about the derivation of 'ought' from 'is' finds its solution in the same way. 'Is', as Hume rightly saw, will not explain 'ought'; but 'ought' is an undeniable reality, a true daughter of the intelligence that we have to acknowledge as the one final reality we know of. To obviate a possible misunderstanding, I do not equate that final creative intelligence with a personal God. We can say no more of that ultimate creative intelligence (which elsewhere, in a purely metaphysical orientation, I call Creative Eternity) than that it is the one reality we are immediately aware of and that is the source of all intelligibility.

Thus I cannot accept without qualification the view that “moral facts can be squeezed into the natural world with no effort at all” and that “if this is right, Hume was completely wrong. ‘Ought’ does not express ‘a new relation or affirmation’: an ‘ought’ turns out to be a kind of ‘is’.” Hume may have been the most influential founder of empiricism, but he did not share the empiricists’ gravest error, reductionism. He understood that ‘ought’ cannot be derived from ‘is’ just as he knew that the idea of the cause cannot be derived from any succession of events. It is because he was not deluded on that count that Kant could find in him the impulse that shook him out of ‘dogmatic slumber’ and led to his transcendental system that reinstated the mind as the source of all intelligibility: an insight that had been amply expressed by Socrates-Plato but had been lost sight of in the interval.

Marginally, I am uneasy about the term ‘meta-ethics’, along with all the other ‘meta’s that have been proliferating lately. To my mind Ethics considers fundamental problems and first principles of the moral life. Discussions about the application of ethical principles in practice may be referred to simply as moral discussions. I would not even speak of applied ethics because that suggests that there can be fixed, final principles and rules in that area. Earlier in his paper Professor Byrne alludes to controversies around such questions as: “Should we give more to charity than we actually do? Is torture permissible under extreme circumstances? Is eating meat wrong? Could it ever be permissible to kill one innocent person in order to save five?” To my mind, it is a sad feature of the present philosophical scene that such questions are debated as if there can be a unique, definitive answer to such questions. Each side tries to prove by argument that it is right and the other side wrong. This is wrong. In our actual imperfect world there can be no perfect solutions. While there are things that are clearly right and things that are clearly wrong, over large areas of the imperfect world of practice different values and different principles can and often do clash. And the proper, civilized, and morally responsible way to deal with such questions is to be sympathetic and understanding towards the opposed viewpoints and to know that practical solutions always involve losses and sacrifices. Only abstract principles are absolute. In practice there has to be give and take and



sympathy and understanding. This is the way it should be in discussing such questions as those relating to abortion and euthanasia.

Who is the author of the moral law? Socrates in the *Crito* emphatically affirms that we must never wrong another; we must never injure another, nor return injury for injury, nor ever do evil in return for evil. Socrates did not receive that injunction from a supernatural source, nor did he acquire it from the conventional morality under which he was reared. He drew that principle from within himself because he felt that not to comply with that rule would be to injure his own integrity. This, I believe, is also the point of Kant's Categorical Imperative and of his insistence on the value of moral autonomy and his assertion that the only absolutely good thing is a good will. Kant's fondness for grand and intricate theoretical superstructures may have obscured the great insight at the foundation of his position, but if "in the juggernaut of contemporary meta-ethics [Kant] has not been in the driver's seat", so much the worse for contemporary meta-ethics.

I am not commenting on Professor Byrne's survey of various meta-ethical theories. I have always maintained that it is not the proper task of philosophy to prove or disprove any theoretical position. Philosophy is not concerned with establishing the truth of any statement or discovering any fact relating to the actual world but with attaining and giving insight into our own proper inner reality. But I will put in a word about a sentence Byrne quotes from John Mackie, that if there were moral facts "they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe." Well, so they are. Those who find this queer do so because they have a very narrow conception of what is in the universe. In the universe there is beauty and love and humour and sadness, which are all "utterly different from anything else in the universe". I call these realities as opposed to actualities or phenomenal existents. I know that my linguistic usage here sounds odd, but I find my unconventional terminology necessary to give expression to my non-mainstream philosophical position.

I do not agree that "once all the naturalistic facts about suffering, enjoyment, and so on are in place, the moral facts are implicitly settled: an 'ought' does follow from an 'is'." The facts of a situation do not generate or

dictate the 'ought' but – the 'ought' being independently given – determine the specific form in which the 'ought' is to be applied.

“Concerns about the status of morality soon spread like spilled ink: if there's no room for ethics in a disenchanted nature, most of our distinctively human form of life is also excluded”, says Professor Byrne, and I couldn't agree more.

One final trifle: Professor Byrne refers to “about 100 years' worth” of philosophizing that helps to show naïve moral judgements “might even be right”. I risk disclosing a personal prejudice: I do not feel that the philosophy of the past 100 years or so, on balance, contributed much that is positive to our understanding. For “more philosophy” to cure the harm done by “a little bit of philosophy” I would rather go some twenty-four centuries back. Would that the philosophers of the past 100 years did not think themselves so much wiser than their ancient predecessors. Professor Byrne concludes by quoting Bertrand Russell's statement that “philosophy removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.” For myself, I know no one who did that better than Socrates-Plato (one cannot really split these).

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

Comment on “Do the Impossible: Know Thyself” by Theodore Dalrymple,  
*New English Review*, March 2007.

In the following lines I approach the question from an angle different from but not opposed to or at variance with that of Dr. Dalrymple, whose conclusions I find insightful, sagacious, and truly enlightening. Indeed, I fear that my angle of approach being so different, my comments may be thought irrelevant to the content of the article.

I agree that it is an illusion to think that we are “on the verge of ... a breakthrough in self-understanding”, not, however, because self-understanding is an impossibility but because we are taking the wrong road to that destination.

A question ‘that is in principle unanswerable’ might be unanswerable not because it demands the impossible but because the question-form suggests that the answer be sought outside the terms of the question, whereas the terms of the question do constitute the reality sought. Thus the endless quandaries of neuroscience and philosophy of mind stem from the error of treating the mind as an object to be explained in terms of other objects – be those elements, concepts, or processes – instead of seeing the self-evident reality of the mind as the first principle of all meaning and all explanation.

This position is not to be confounded with the belief that the thorny practical problems of human existence have been solved. The inner reality of the mind may be our citadel, but on the outside not only the world at large,

not only human society at large, not only our body, but even all the drives, inclinations, fears, imposed dogmas and superstitions that throng the mind, form a dark and fearsome jungle that we can only cut through slowly by the instruments of empirical inquiry and pragmatic trial and error. Only those who have surrendered their minds to dogmatism of whatever kind think there are ready, definitive answers to the problems of human existence. But this question is distinct from and should be kept distinct from that of the philosophical question about the mind.

I have no problem, for instance, with conceding that neuropsychiatry may be of help in dealing with certain behavioural or interpersonal problems.

However, self-understanding, the self-understanding that Socrates preached, that Buddha sought, is not something to be achieved, by an individual person or by humanity at large, definitively and once for all. It is not knowledge arrived at and established by some science: it is a way of life, founded on the realization that our inner reality, our inner life, which can only be in the exercise of intelligence, in living as rational beings, is what makes us human and is what gives us what worth we might claim. This self-understanding is not impossible, it is something all normal human beings have some flicker of, but it is not something that may be captured in any fixed objective formulation.

## A NOTE ON REDUCTIONISM

Thoughts suggested by John Dupré's review of Alex Rosenberg's  
*Darwinian Reductionism: Or, How to Stop Worrying and Love Molecular  
Biology* (American Scientist online, May-June, 2007:  
<http://www.americanscientist.org/template/BookReviewTypeDetail/assetid/5122> )

Prefatory Note: Reductionism is a subject that has often provoked me to strong comment, and the first part of the following note was an almost involuntary reflex to the title of Professor Dupré's review of Alex Rosenberg's book, which I jotted down before I had read a single word beyond the title. The tone of the note is perhaps somewhat irritated and whimsical. Further, at least the first paragraph must sound enigmatic. If what I have just said sends the reader off, neither s/he nor I will have lost anything of much value.

I

Reductionism is always right and, at the same time, always wrong. Yet advocates and opponents of reductionism are not thereby reconciled. Those who find satisfaction in reductionist 'explanations' normally fail to see how those 'explanations' are the wrong answer to a certain type of question while those who see the wrongness of reductionist answers for a specific kind of

question tend to ignore the validity and value of those same reductionist answers to a different kind of question. The failure of understanding between reductionists and their opponents may be partly congenital – we are all born into the one category or the other – but it is compounded by the failure of mainline philosophy to acknowledge that philosophy and science are radically distinct approaches. This is the heterodoxy I have been trying to advance in all my writings, from *Let Us Philosophize* in 1998 to “Explaining Explanation” quite recently.

Since everything that comes into being in the natural world has an ancestry of other beings in the natural world, it is always possible to break down what has become into what it had been and in a sense it is right to equate the new and the old. But when the scientist says that the flower is earth and water and energy from the sun, the fool says: No, it is not; and the fool is not always wrong. Kant said that  $5+7 = 12$  is a synthetic, not an analytic, judgement, and Plato had said the same thing, using the very same figures 5, 7, and 12. Why? Plato says that 12 is an instance of *auto to on* and, on Plato’s behalf, I would venture to say that the flower also is an instance of *auto to on*.

Perhaps this does not seem like so much after all. Well, it may not seem like much to say that the idea of 12 is something over and above the ideas of 5 and 7. It may even not seem like much to say that the flower is something over and above the components and processes that went into its flowering. But perhaps it begins to look like something when we say that the mind is something over and above the brain and all its neuronal doings and happenings. And perhaps it begins to look like something when we say that life is something over and above all that biochemistry has it in its ken. And it begins to look like very much to say that the mind is not only a reality but is the only reality of which we have immediate and self-evident knowledge and that life is a reality and is the most precious thing we know. This is Platonism as I understand it.

Now theologians come and, in opposition to reductionists who tell us that life is nothing but so-and-so and that the mind is nothing but so-and-so, want us to believe that life and mind are mysterious entities introduced by or from

some supernatural source. They make life and mind alien intruders in our world. Instead of holding that life and mind are something over and above the physical elements that go into their making, they make life and mind into something foreign to nature and opposed to natural processes. And the battle rages between those who tell us that there is nothing real beyond, apart from, or other than the elements and processes of the natural world, and those who assure us that the account given of life and mind in terms of the elements and processes of nature is false and that the truth comes from a source outside the natural world.

What is the relevance to all of this of the radical distinction I said we have to draw between science and philosophy? And what did I mean when I said at the beginning of this note that reductionism is always right and always wrong? It is this: Science, with its reductionist approach and reductionist methods, will tell us how things come to be. That is its work. That is the only way we can have knowledge of things – all things – as they are. But science will not give us understanding of the meaning, the inner essence, of anything. It is the business of philosophy, of poetry, of art, to explore the meaning and reveal the essence of things. Science can tell us how a flower comes to be, but only a poet, an artist, will put us in possession of the meaning, in communion with the essence, of a flower, or, as Socrates would say, it is by the idea of beauty – a pure creation of the mind that you can find nowhere but in the mind – that a beautiful thing is beautiful for us. The danger of failing to make this radical distinction between the proper spheres of science and philosophy is that otherwise we find ourselves pressed between the claims of a supernatural source for all value and meaning, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, an exclusive reliance on natural explanation, which, to say the least, tends to enfeeble our awareness of the inner realities of life and the mind.

This is what I tried to bring out in all my books and in such essays as “On What is Real”, “God or Nature?”, “Must Values be Objective?”, “The Need for Spirituality”, etc., etc.

Coming now to the review article, Professor Dupré states that Alex Rosenberg “believes that everything is ultimately determined by what happened at the physical level — and that this entails that the mind is ‘nothing but’ the brain.” I see the first part of this statement as a serviceable working hypothesis for science, but it is with the ‘nothing but’ section that things start to go awry. To put it strongly, perhaps rather offensively, I believe that Professor Rosenberg, as a scientist, has no business with the mind. Well, I’ll be told that Professor Rosenberg is a philosopher of biology, which, to me, has an incongruous ring: I believe that mixing science and philosophy inevitably leads to confusion. I would prefer to speak of theoretical biology, a discipline which should concern itself with general, basic principles of the phenomena of life but which should keep clear of any question of meaning, purpose, or essence.

Since I make no claim to any specialized scientific knowledge, I am not qualified to comment on Dupré’s criticism of Rosenberg’s position. I have no problem with supposing that, whatever the state of the theory of biology may be at present, some day a complete reduction of biological phenomena to what happens at the physical level may be achieved. That will not, in my view, mean that such a theory will be in a position to provide answers to the philosophical questions about the meaning and value of life. These can only be answered in terms of ideas and ideals generated by and in the mind.

But, marginally, I will allow myself to say that the paragraph quoted by Dupré from Rosenberg on Dobzhansky sounds as stolid as the most extreme of theological dogmatisms. It is a pity that the absurdities of Creationists and Intelligent-Designists practically discourage rational criticism of the over-confident claims of Darwinists. They also keep in check a needed distinction between Darwinian theory and the more general theory or principle of evolution.

Professor Dupré seems to be justified in referring to Rosenberg’s “implausible position” and “reactionary argument”. Perhaps Professor Rosenberg’s reductionism is of a kind that effectively falsifies my opening contention that reductionism is always right and, at the same time, always



wrong. His seems to be very little in the right and very much in the wrong. But I confess this is a personal impression on the part of a confessed ignoramus and on very meagre evidence to boot.

## ATHEISTS VERSUS THEISTS

[Appeared in [www.butterfliesandwheels.com](http://www.butterfliesandwheels.com) on 25 May, 2007:  
<http://www.butterfliesandwheels.com/articleprint.php?num=247> ]

The ongoing debate between atheists and theists has become ludicrous, banal, and unprofitable. I have long thought that the more vociferous atheists were following a wrong strategy and wrong tactics, leaving the religionists free to pose as unrivalled defenders of moral values and the realities of the life of the spirit (the expression 'spiritual life' has become suspect among rationalists and been ceded to religion, which is a pity). The propagandist and frenzied approach of the fashionable atheists is reducing us to the sorry choice between dogmatic religion and stark materialism. So it was a pleasure to come across a sane and balanced review article by Anthony Gottlieb: [http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2007/05/21/070521crbo\\_books\\_gottlieb](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2007/05/21/070521crbo_books_gottlieb)

Gottlieb reminds us that in the second century of the Christian era "it was Christians who were called 'atheists,' because they failed to worship the accepted gods." We may also recall that in fifth century BC Athens Anaxagoras was accused of atheism because he taught that the sun was not a god but a flaming piece of matter. Socrates was accused of atheism because he did not revere the gods that the city revered, even though he could pray not only to Zeus and Pan but also to the sun.

Anaxagoras, Socrates, and early Christians, beside rejecting the beliefs commonly accepted by those around them, had their positive beliefs. Today

vocal atheists are all energetically engaged in the task of breaking down dogmatic beliefs, but they do not show as much energy in advancing the positive aspect of their thought.

The task of emancipating humanity from the clutches of superstition, fanaticism, and bigotry, is needed and is urgent. But neither the enthusiasm of the all-out atheists nor the desperate but tepid efforts of the religious moderates show any signs of success in that direction. The outspoken atheists are read and applauded by those who are already convinced of the harm done by religions. The moderate religionists cannot make headway with their fundamentalist co-religionists, because in each of the major established religions (I speak chiefly of the monotheisms that I know at first hand) there is as much authoritative textual support for the extremists as for the moderates; and all talk about inter-faith conciliation and understanding is deception or self-deception because each religion in its heart of hearts denounces the others as worthy of damnation. The best they can achieve among themselves is a truce necessitated by the inability of any one of them to eradicate the others.

The human situation is sickening. If there are gods up there they must be debating not if but how to put an end to the whole bad project. If we give up on the gods and decide that we have to rely on our own devices, then the way forward as I see it is a two-pronged drive.

The human world is in very bad shape. There is abject poverty, disease, ignorance, misery, side by side with abundance, waste, astounding technology — I need not go on. Our politicians and economists play games in their artificial, closed systems of unquestioned fictions of expediency, power, market values, economic forces — all of which are worshipped more blindly than any supernatural god has ever been. The world of human beings must be re-formed on a wiser and more just basis. This is the first prong of the combined drive. In the short term we may have to fight terrorism and all sorts of conflict by various means but in the long term a united world based on justice, equal opportunity for all humans, and dignity for all humans, is the prerequisite for withering the roots of terrorism and conflict.

Secondly, we have to work towards a new age of enlightenment, to spread

understanding and fellow-feeling among all humans. No amount of bare, disjointed facts, can infuse sense into life. The positive, empirical knowledge obtained by the methodology of the sciences, can be useful (or harmful) but cannot nourish the human spirit. Humans need a ‘likely tale’ (to borrow a phrase from Plato) to hold on to, to give the chaotic mass of their experiential content some coherence. To the naïve and simple masses of humankind their received religions satisfy that need but – as we should by now have discovered – it does so at a heavy cost. We need a culture that fosters moral and spiritual values unlinked to dogma and superstition. This is the task of art, literature, and philosophy. That will be our alternative to religion, but we should take great care not to turn it into a new religion: we need an alternative to religion, not an alternative religion.

The way forward I have indicated, with its two branches, will be slow, full of hardship, and not at all certain. But there is no other way.

In *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008) I concluded the chapter on Religion as follows:

“The one perfect religion that has ever been given to mankind has been grossly misunderstood, neglected and almost completely forgotten; the religion whose prophet claimed no knowledge, no wisdom, no power, no authority — whose name was Socrates. Socrates may have had the temperament of a mystic. Yet we acclaim him as a philosopher precisely because he went beyond mysticism. He demanded that whatever we hold valuable be fully intelligible. He was deeply religious; he sought the fullness of the inner life. But he was not content with a mystical richness of life, and there lay his glory.

“No specific knowledge, no body of doctrine, can secure our salvation: Only a free, ever-creative mind will give us salvation. Not any body of knowledge, but the creative pursuit of understanding, makes us into what we crave to be — whole human beings. That should be the ideal of education.”

## THE SORRY STATE OF PLATO SCHOLARSHIP

The state of Plato scholarship is deplorable. It has become an industry. But in saying this I am wronging industry. Progressive industry has creative research behind it. In Plato scholarship research itself has become a mechanical skill off which anyone who is not a complete dunce can make a lucrative business.

I have just read a learned review and I am saddened: a review by Professor Dustin A. Gish of Professor Devin Stauffer's *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias: Rhetoric, Justice, and the Philosophic Life*:

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/2007/2007-05-09.html> I give here a selection of the many angry notes I jotted down while reading the review.

We read that "Socrates counters Polus in a Machiavellian mode, adopting an extreme stance, commonly known as the 'Socratic thesis,' according to which doing injustice, far more than suffering injustice, is the greatest evil for human beings." To say this, in my view is to reveal the sad fact that we have become incapable of understanding the ground principle of the Socrates-Platonic moral philosophy. What, in the hands of academic pundits has become a paradoxical Socratic thesis to be explained and confuted, is the insight by which Socrates lived and for which he died. To have a particle of doubt about this is to make of Socrates' whole life and of his death a bad joke. In the *Crito* we read that we are never intentionally to do wrong ... doing wrong is always evil and dishonourable ... Nor when injured injure in return, as the many imagine, for we must injure no one at all ... We may do no evil ... Nor do evil in return for evil, which is the morality of the many

... [I am picking up phrases from Jowett's translation, which may not be state-of-the art for our pundits, but which is good enough for my purpose.] Can anyone with any feeling characterize this as a 'stance'? Socrates may have been truly a fool, but Plato was under no illusion; he makes Socrates warn that "this opinion has never been held, and will never be held, by any considerable number of persons; and those who are agreed and those who are not agreed upon this point have no common ground, and can only despise one another when they see how widely they differ." (Jowett) (See *Plato: An Interpretation*, 2005, Chapter Two, "The Rationality of Socrates Moral Philosophy" .)

So when we read of a "seemingly impassable divide between" Callicles and Socrates, I would say that the divide, far from being merely 'seemingly impassable', is the totally unbridgeable one between "those who are agreed and those who are not agreed upon this point".

Professor Gish writes, "Stauffer's thesis is that the unity of the *Gorgias* derives from Socrates' concern throughout the dialogue with rhetoric. This means that the ascent implied by the tri-partite division of the dialogue ... is deceptive, for the thrust of its arguments toward (a defense of) the philosophic life – its action – never transcends rhetoric at all." I will not argue against this. I will simply say that, in my reading of Plato, all that he wrote had one lodestar, the philosophic life. To look for any overriding concern other than that in any work of Plato's is to miss its central nexus and give it a false interpretation.

Evidently the book not only makes Socrates concerned with rhetoric; it also makes much of a "Socratic rhetoric" and of a "noble rhetoric" which Socrates is supposed to advocate. The insistence on transforming Socrates' dialectic into a 'noble rhetoric' on the strength of a marginal remark by Socrates about a possible proper use of rhetoric, and the making of the 'noble rhetoric' into the central theme of the dialogue, is a distortion of the position of Plato and a corruption of Plato's linguistic usage. What do we gain by calling Socrates' dialectic rhetoric, obliterating the distinction that Plato was at pains to establish? It is one thing for us moderns (and for the ancients outside the Academy) to speak of rhetoric in a new sense, a proper

rhetoric that may be part of serious literary studies; it is quite another thing, which makes for confusion, to make the term cover both the rhetoric of the Sophists and the dialectic of Socrates in discussing a work of Plato's. (It is only in the *Phaedrus* that Plato showed tentative interest in rhetoric as an art of effective writing or effective speech.)

We read of the "mystery of Socrates' interest in Gorgias" as a mystery "raised but not resolved in the dialogue's prelude". This is one of those pseudo-problems that academic philosophers fabricate to keep themselves in business. The Socrates of the dialogue is interested in Gorgias because the author of the *Gorgias* was throughout his life concerned with the opposition between rhetoric and the candid give and take of philosophical discussion.

However plausible Stauffer's psychological analyses of the dramatic personae of the dialogue may be, I think it perverts Plato's intention to think that his primary object was to expose the conflicts and contradictions inhering in the souls of Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. In the Socratic elenctic discourses, Socrates unravels the contradictions and confusions in the minds of his interlocutors to make them look inward into their own minds. The *Gorgias* is not properly an elenctic discourse. Here Socrates is not in search of the meaning of a term (which is the common scheme of the elenctic discourses) but is actively advocating the one positive principle of his life: the whole worth of a human being is in the integrity of the soul which we must preserve at all costs, even at the cost of readily suffering injustice in preference to committing injustice.

So they make of the *Gorgias*, the manifesto of the philosophic life, an insincere tournament of wits in which the wily Socrates, with his Machiavellian rhetoric beats the more naïve rhetoric of the Sophists. They murder both Socrates and Plato — I wish they did it in anger! No, they do it coldly to find in the cadavers matter for their learned dissertations.

I hope no one will think me such an imbecile as to ignore the importance and value of scholarship or to deny that good work is being done in Plato scholarship. The professional, expert work of scholars is indeed important, helpful, and valuable. Examining the historical and social circumstances surrounding a philosophical work; discovering sources and influences;

clarifying obscurities and arcane allusions; scrutinizing technical and logical complexities — all of that can shed light on a philosophical work as on a literary work or a work of art. But when that takes the place of finding philosophical inspiration in a philosophical work; when it hinders our entering into living dialogue with the mind behind the work and creatively examining for ourselves the problem that mind was wrestling with in the first place, then such scholarship becomes decisively harmful. Even when examining a highly systematic, purely theoretical, formally discursive work such as, for instance, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, such treatment does not help us get at the true substance of the work. In the case of Plato, it is murderous.



## RICHARD HARRIES ON CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Yet another adverse review of Christopher Hitchens' apparently provocative book *God Is Not Great: The Case Against Religion*, but this time the attack from the Christian camp is staid and soberly reasoned, as befits a former Bishop of Oxford and honorary professor of Theology at King's College, London: <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,2109068,00.html>

I'll set down my thoughts and reactions as I jotted them down while reading the review without much editing or refinement.

First I must say that I am not defending Dennett or Dawkins or Hitchens whose "diatribes against religion" Professor Richard Harries is concerned to counter. In my view the onslaughts of recent advocates of atheism while satisfying confirmed atheists fail to win over any believers.

Professor Harries admits that the evils perpetrated in the name of religion are real enough. He also admits that the intellectual crudities of some of religion's defenders are obvious enough. I would say that the theological subtleties of some other defenders of religion while the reverse of crude are still as absurd as the crudities of the first group.

Then Professor Harries poses a good question: "But how is it that the majority of the world's great philosophers, composers, scholars, artists and poets have been believers, often of a very devout kind?" This is a very good question and I think that the major fault of the advocates of atheism is that they direct their energies to the easier task of showing the crudities and absurdities of common religion instead of addressing the harder question

posed by Harries.

My answer in brief to the question – the brief answer I give here can be no more than a rough sketch; all my writings can be seen as an attempt to give a fuller answer – is that the religion of an Einstein, a Whitehead, a Schleiermacher, a Shelley (to throw in some names at random) has nothing to do with the religion of even the best of ‘ordinary’ Christians, Jews, or Moslems. Shelley’s poetry reveals a deep devotion to the all-pervading, all-encompassing spirit of Nature, yet he was expelled from Oxford for defending atheism. Whitehead defined religion as what one does with one’s solitariness. Schleiermacher said: “Religion’s essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling ... religion is the sensibility and taste for the infinite ... to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion. But whatever would go beyond that and penetrate deeper into the nature and substance of the whole is no longer religion, and will, if it still wants to be regarded as such, inevitably sink back into empty mythology.”

These are specimens of ‘religion’ with which no observing Jew, Christian, or Moslem can identify. Let us remember that many a profoundly ‘religious’ mystic was murdered by his co-religionists. I need only mention Giordano Bruno among Christians and Al-Hallaj among Moslems. Personally, I wish Schleiermacher, Whitehead, Einstein, had not spoken of religion or of God; that only makes for confusion, for what these words meant for them was utterly different from what they mean for the followers of established religions.

Professor Harries writes: “Religion is rooted in our capacity to recognise and appreciate value; in our search for truth; in our recognition that some things are good in themselves.” I am all for that, except for my reservation as to the use of the word ‘religion’. Harries goes on to say that “it is in this capacity to recognise, appreciate and respond to what is of worth that religion has its origin.” The roots in their natural soil and without external manipulation flower in Kant’s “ever new and increasing admiration and awe” that fill the mind when we reflect on “the starry heavens above and the moral law within”, but no further. They certainly do not bear the fruit of “submission and surrender” which Hitchens rightly rejects and Harries tries to justify. But how does that support belief in a personal creator? The

weakest link in Kant's majestic critical system is his jump from the Ideas (in Kant's sense) or ideals of reason to a justification of belief in God and the immortality of the soul.

Harries says: "If 'submission and surrender' have a place, it is only in the final insight that, if there is an ultimate goodness, it will by definition make a total difference to the way we view life." I believe in "an ultimate goodness", and this is a point where I part company with some of my atheist or anti-religion friends. (Incidentally, this is also what makes my position so unpopular, angering both the theists and the atheists equally.) But then my position differs from that of Professor Harries in two ways: (1) My idea of "an ultimate goodness" in no way leads to belief in a personal creator over and above and beyond Nature (which includes human beings and human minds). (2) My idea of "an ultimate goodness" is my idea, is a vision that lends intelligibility to the dumb appearances thrust by the world on my apprehension but that in no way justifies me or anyone else in making an objectively valid judgement of the world.

I also agree implicitly with Professor Harries's penultimate paragraph. I agree that secular ideologies can be as pernicious as religious ones. Materialism, consumerism, cut-throat competitiveness are such ideologies. A humanity where abundance exists side by side with poverty, a humanity where scientific and technological miracles rub shoulders with deprivation, disease, and starvation, is a very sick humanity. But the cure is not in the unreason of established religions; the cure of reason gone astray is in yet more reason.

Professor Harries is certainly right in maintaining that the real problem of humanity resides in human beings being "organised in groups of various kinds, still beset by ... lack of self-knowledge, viciousness and moral weakness." He is right in saying that "all people of wisdom need to cooperate, whatever the springs of their moral outlook." But are the followers of established religions prepared for such cooperation? The politicizing of religion not only by fundamentalist Moslems but also by fundamentalist Christians and fundamentalist Jews is ominous.

Besides, supposing we could have a world where all the major religions, not only the monotheisms but also Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., agreed to a policy of peaceful co-existence, would it really be a good thing for humans

to live under  $x$  different dogmatic belief-systems where  $x-1$  systems are necessarily false and no one can decide which is the one that is the exception? That would be the final surrender to unreason.

Harries concludes that “Hitchens has written a book that is seriously harmful.” I beg to disagree. I would say that Hitchens, Dawkins, Dennett and others have written books that fall short of the mark. They do not do enough to free people from the bondage of dogmatism and superstition. Kant wrote a book entitled “Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone”. What recent advocates of atheism failed to do was to address the need for “Spirituality Within the Bounds of Reason Alone”.

## THE TRUTH CRAZE

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There has recently been a craze for Truth. Books, articles, websites, weblogs, have been preaching the importance or necessity of ‘truth’. The advocacy has been carried out with something like religious fanaticism — excusably, because its main incentive has been to counter an opposed religious position that seeks to bypass or transcend the claim of science to be the sole arbiter in deciding factual questions. Since, under the circumstances, any attempt to examine the claims of the friends of ‘truth’ exposes the daredevil who makes the attempt to the charge of standing in the camp of the religionists, I have to make clear at the outset that I am as opposed to the religious camp as any empirical materialist. Kant put an end to theological pretences when he explained that theological claims can neither be validated by empirical methods nor justified by pure reasoning.

Permit me also to put forward two other preliminary remarks. The first is that I am not here dealing with the flurry of academic interest in the Theory of Truth. This is a subject I hope to come back to some other time. I expect that most of the advocates of ‘truth’ I mean to address in the present paper would lump the academic controversies raging about the definition of Truth with theological controversies and apologetics. My second preliminary remark is that while questioning the universal relevance of ‘truth’ I would emphasize the absolute importance and necessity of truthfulness and rationality, by which I mean sincerity, rejection of deception, above all self-deception, and unqualified submission to the jurisdiction of reason.

Well, then, what issue do I take with the advocates of Truth? It is, first,

that they speak as if there were one clearly defined concept of 'truth', and, secondly, that they maintain or imply that that concept is equally relevant in all fields of human thought.

Suppose we take truth to be that quality which attaches to acceptable answers to meaningful questions. A trial jury, a historian, a doctor, a medical researcher, a physicist, a biologist, an economist, would seek answers to questions that are unlike to each other. The acceptable answers in each category are to be sought by applying distinct methodologies and have to satisfy different criteria. But they share one common character: they all relate to objective fact. And in all of these cases we can sensibly speak of truth, approximation to truth, or probability.

But let us look at other areas where I say the concept of truth is not only inapplicable but may be positively injurious. I will give three samples.

ONE: Debates surrounding such issues as euthanasia, abortion, security versus civil/human rights, etc., are being interminably conducted with crusading vehemence, to no avail. Why? To my mind the reason is that the opposing sides to such controversies believe that their position is susceptible of logical demonstration and rests on true propositions. If we realize that in such issues we deal with values that are only absolute and inviolable in the intelligible realm (the Platonic celestial sphere of Ideas) but which in our actual imperfect world will often clash, then we see that such issues cannot be resolved by pure logic, but only by a spirit of toleration, by giving due weight and consideration to the opposed values involved, by moving tentatively, by trial and error, towards a balance, shifting and adjustable. The adversaries in such controversies err gravely when each tries to prove one side right and the other side wrong. What each side should do is to make sure the values they defend are not overlooked or neglected while at the same time acknowledging the importance and necessity of the values on the other side. There is no call for Truth here, for in an imperfect world there can be no 'true' solutions to practical problems. What we need is sympathy and understanding and reasonableness.

TWO: When Socrates says that it is better to suffer injury than to perpetrate injury, this statement can neither be proved nor disproved; it

cannot therefore be said to be true. Is it therefore meaningless? Is it mere rhetoric? My answer is a most decided No. It is meaningful because it expresses an attitude that generates in us a fuller life. Since this view has been central to all my writings, I do not find it necessary to expand on it here.

THREE: Spinoza in his great posthumous *Ethics* gives us a majestic system of interwoven concepts, forming an internally coherent ideal whole, an intelligible world in its own right. Spinoza, the mathematician, who came of age under the shadow of Descartes, prided himself on presenting his system *ordine geometrico demonstrata*. But nobody has ever believed that Spinoza's towering system has been proved true or could ever be proved true. I could have taken for my example Berkeley or Schopenhauer or Bradley or A. N. Whitehead — to pick up names at random. Are such metaphysical systems therefore valueless? Such philosophers wrong themselves and wrong their philosophies by making a claim to truth and by making a show of demonstration and proof. Indeed they have given the whole of philosophy a bad name by so doing. The value of such metaphysical systems resides in their creating imaginative conceptual worlds in which the givennesses of our experience and the mysteries of human life find meaning: not 'true' meaning but vital meaning or spiritual meaning if you will, the meaning we find in a sonata, a landscape painting, a poem. Hence I maintain that the truth-claim is as pernicious in what I term philosophy proper as it is in religion.

It is true that science also, especially in its highest reaches, creates imaginative conceptual systems that give intelligibility to phenomena, but there is an important difference. It is always with much apprehension that I even make mention of science because I claim no scientific knowledge. But let me venture to say that science is concerned with the objective: objectivity is the *sine qua non* of science. Hence I say that science has for its province the actual or, to use a phrase dear to empiricists, what is the case. There the value of Truth reigns supreme. Philosophy and poetry and art are concerned with our inner reality, and there, if we speak of truth, it is only in the sense of Shakespeare's 'to thine own self be true'.

So it seems that I have no quarrel with the Truth Party after all. My complaint is that in our enthusiasm for a Truth which is the hallmark of empirical knowledge we tend to overlook realities, experiences, and values which will not submit to the empirical tests required for obtaining the Truth Licence, while I, foolishly no doubt, believe that these unlicensed realities and values are what our ailing and suffering humanity most needs.



## WHEN IS TRUTH A BAD THING?

On the question of truth I have been saying things that have put me in opposition with people with whom I share much. That I regret, but I cannot refrain from reiterating my position, since I cannot betray the 'truth' as I see it.

In science and for science truth is a prime virtue. Without truth science is the antithesis of science and is far worse than ignorance.

In the practical walks of life, truth is vital. Without truth you lose your way in the walks of life.

In poetry truth is a fault. Truthfulness and veracity are needful for poetry, but not verity.

In philosophy truth is a deceptive demon. Truthfulness and veracity are the very soul of philosophy, but not verity.

Science deals with a determinate object. There truth has its proper place.

Philosophy is concerned with absolutes and with the absolute. There truth is death.

Philosophy presents a vision, an essentially transient view of reality from an evanescent viewpoint. If it deny equal truthfulness to alternative viewpoints it thereby destroys its sole ground of meaningfulness.

Mystics dwell closest to the heart of Reality. But it is only their subjective experience that is valuable. Their articulations of that experience become hurtful when they lay claim to truth.

Plato always sang the praises of *alêtheia*, but *alêtheia* for Plato was not

truth but reality: not the meretricious ‘reality’ of things we can see and touch and measure, but the genuine reality of intelligible forms beheld in active *phronêsis*, as I have shown in chapters six and seven of *Plato: An Interpretation*.

Of all modern philosophers, it was only Nietzsche who saw all of this in the clearest light, especially in *Beyond Good and Evil*, “Part One: On the Prejudices of Philosophers”.

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH DARWINISM?

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[http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_160.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_160.html)]

I have lately been reading, for the first time, Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, first published in 1921.(1) In the long preface Shaw comments on the Darwinist-Creationist controversy of his day in a manner which is still relevant to the debate as it is currently waged.

Shaw begins by pointing out a truth that is generally obliterated in the current controversies, namely that Darwin was not the originator of the idea or theory of evolution. Darwinism – whether as originally propounded by Charles Darwin or as what it has become now – is a special theory of evolution or a special chapter in the general theory of evolution. Among the many ancient and modern forerunners in the field, Shaw cites Goethe who “said that all the shapes of creation were cousins; that there must be some common stock from which all the species had sprung; that it was the environment of air that had produced the eagle, of water the seal, and of earth the mole.” Shaw then quotes Erasmus Darwin, the grandfather of Charles, who, in a book published in 1794 says, “The world has been evolved, not created; it has arisen little by little from a small beginning, and has increased through the activity of the elemental forces embodied in itself, and so has rather grown than come into being at an almighty word.” (p.xvi)

Shaw was not primarily concerned to criticize Darwinism as the scientific theory it was in Darwin's work but as the philosophy of materialism and

mechanism, of cut-throat competition and unfeeling struggle for survival that was appended to Darwinism by nineteenth century thought. He describes the atmosphere of thought in his day: “We were intellectually intoxicated with the idea that the world could make itself without design, purpose, skill, or intelligence: in short, without life.” (p.xxxvi) He goes on to say:

“We took a perverse pleasure in arguing, without the least suspicion that we were reducing ourselves to absurdity, that all the books in the British Museum library might have been written word for word as they stand on the shelves if no human being had ever been conscious, just as the trees stand in the forest doing wonderful things without consciousness.” (p.xxxvii)

For myself, I do not even care to quarrel with, or to charge with absurdity, one who maintains that physical elements tumbling and knocking blindly through trillions of years might produce *Hamlet* and Beethoven’s Choral Symphony and all that is good and all that is trash on the WWW. All that, in itself, would be dead, lifeless, meaningless. But a single conscious individual reacting intelligently to *Hamlet*, moved by Beethoven’s music, or feeling indignant at some imbecility on the WWW faces me with a reality that is other than the physical world. This reality, however it may have come about, is what I find meaningful, and it is in this reality that I find life and value and true being. And I cannot think of this reality as a by-product of anything that is without life and without intelligence. To me any existence devoid of life and intelligence is simply unintelligible. To me the fact that is elemental and ineradicable is not the world that presses on me from outside — it is something closer home; it is this life and awareness and will that is on the inside. And I believe that this life and intelligence in which alone I find meaningfulness is fundamental and ultimate.

Shaw, in opposing Darwinism or the Neo-Darwinism of his day, advocates a version of Lamarck’s theory. He writes that to one who “tells you that you

are a product of Circumstantial Selection solely” you may offer “the counter-assurance that you are the product of Lamarckian evolution, formerly called Functional Adaptation and now Creative Evolution, and challenge him to disprove that, which he can no more do than you can disprove Circumstantial Selection, both forces being conceivably able to produce anything if you only give them rope enough.” (xxxviii)

This challenge, as I see it, involves the same confusion that vitiates the current controversies between the Darwinists and the Creationists or their present-day successors, the Intelligent Design advocates. In my view, it is an error to treat the vitalism that may underlie Lamarck’s theory, or Schopenhauer’s Will, or Bergson’s Creative Evolution, as on a par with Darwin’s theory of natural selection. (Curiously, Shaw, while speaking of Creative Evolution and even using the expression *Élan Vital*, does not mention Bergson anywhere in his book.) Darwin describes a method, an observed process, which may or may not be seen as adequate to account for the successive changes in living species. Darwin, whether he was quite clear in his own mind on this point or not, was not concerned with what was behind the processes he described. It is not impossible that biologists may find it desirable or necessary to supplement natural selection with a revised version of Lamarck’s adaptation and inheritance of acquired qualities or something similar to that. This would still exclude any consideration of what is behind the process. That cannot be approached by scientific method. Scientific method can only tell us how – in what manner – the change has come about, but not what made it come about.

The how remains a brute fact without intrinsic meaning. Then comes a Schopenhauer who says we may conceive of a Will at the heart of things. This confers meaning on the phenomena of life but does not add anything to the facts observed and reported by objective science. A Goethe, a Schopenhauer, a Bergson, a Whitehead, is a poet that takes hold of brute fact and educates its brutality, shapes it into meaning, but does not produce facts. You might say, Well, similarly, a Creationist or Intelligent Design advocate may say: I conceive of a Creator or a Designer behind nature. He may, but there is a difference. The Creationist means us to regard his Creator

factually, as an existent entity. As I see it, that makes the Creator an object on a par with the physical world. He should then be subject to the same criteria and methods of verification applicable to nature, and by those criteria and methods he fails.

Moreover, suppose that you can demonstrate empirically that there is a mighty being out there controlling all the processes of the world. How can you show that that mighty being is not itself an automaton whose movements are purely mechanical? A mind out there is a contradiction in terms. It becomes a mere addendum to the natural world, a tortoise that carries the elephant that carries the world.

Metaphysics does not, or should not, pretend to give us knowledge of the world outside of us, though metaphysicians commonly speak as if they do. According to the point of view that I have been trying to put through in all my writings, a metaphysician, properly, gives us a principle of intelligibility which makes the world make sense for us, makes the objectively chaotic and dumb world orderly and coherent. The metaphysician is in the same business as the poet and the artist who make the mindless sound and fury of the world signify something. That is why there can be various metaphysical systems, equally meaningful, just as there can be various epics, dramas, symphonies, equally fulfilling.

Does this land us in unrepentant Protagorean relativism? No, since I maintain that what we find to be real – what gives us our concept of ultimate reality – is our inner reality, the reality of creative intelligence and creative love within us. This reality is absolute and ineradicable. But it is ineffable. It cannot be constrained in a determined formulation. But it can be given mythical expression. Hence the possibility of endless metaphysical representations, opposed in letter but one in affirming the one reality we find within us.

Shaw, in his espousal of Lamarckism in opposition to Darwinism, was trespassing into territory that he had no call to stray into, but he is on firmer ground when he takes up the opposition between mechanism and vitalism. (p.lv). I think he insightfully portrays the plight of philosophical thinking in his own day and in ours when he says: “Our minds have reacted so violently

to provable logical theorems and demonstrable mechanical or chemical facts that we have become incapable of metaphysical truth.” (p.lvi) Metaphysical truth has become completely lost to recent and contemporary thinking. This is not only sad; at the present juncture of human civilization it is ominous.

Footnote:

(1) Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*, 1921. The page references are to the Penguin Books edition, 1939.

## AN APOLOGY FOR NAÏVE PHILOSOPHY

The following sketchy note will be found by many ambiguous and by many more wrong-headed. I offer it as a provocation and a challenge, no more.

If Socrates were to come back into our world and were invited to partake of the rich fare offered by our present-day philosophy departments with their numerous and continuously increasing disciplines, I believe that he would answer with words similar to those Plato makes him say, though in a different context: “I have no leisure for such inquiries. Because, my friend, I am unable yet to comply with the Delphian injunction to know myself. It would be ludicrous, while ignorant of this, to examine things which are not my concern. I leave such inquiries alone and, instead, examine myself.” (See *Phaedrus*, 229e-230a.) Not that he would belittle these sophisticated disciplines and studies, but he would simply say, as he said of physical inquiries in the ‘autobiographical’ passage in the *Phaedo*, that they are not his concern. For in that passage, Socrates draws a line between inquiry into nature, which is the concern of science, and the examination of one’s own mind, which is the proper concern of philosophy. He considers these as two completely independent domains.

You might say that Socrates should find in such a discipline as the philosophy of mind, with or without the support of neuroscience, something answering to his quest for self-knowledge. No, Socrates would say; the philosophy of mind makes of mind an object to be known by observation and objective analysis. The self-knowledge sought by Socrates is a probing within one’s soul — to use the word Socrates would have used but which



has now become suspect, a probing of the subject and not of the object. Philosophy of mind, no less than psychology as it is now studied, no less than neuroscience, is a science that may give us much valuable objective knowledge, even knowledge about ourselves, but does not give us any understanding of ourselves.

What if Socrates were asked what he thought about Experimental Philosophy? Let me answer for him: Nothing in human life or human activity is clear-cut and hermetically sealed. (I am not contradicting what I said above.) So I will not say that the ‘experimental philosophy’ has no connection with philosophy. But it is not of the essence of philosophy. In philosophy proper we probe ourselves, we examine our values, and, most importantly, our presuppositions. A ‘philosophical experiment’ just like any chance event in life, may shock us into looking at a dormant or a gloomy nook of our thought. But it is not the ‘philosophical experiment’ or the outcome of the experiment that is philosophy; it is the incidentally triggered reflection and self-examination. A philosopher can derive as much good from observing and experimenting as he can from taking a good walk or a refreshing swim — positive good, no doubt; but equally accidental in both cases; it does not mean we may turn philosophy into a science: that way we lose much more than we gain.

But Plato, you might say, did not stop at Socratic self-examination. He soared high into metaphysics. True. Plato caught from Parmenides the yearning for absolute reality. But where did he find absolute reality? Ultimately in the Form of the Good, which is nothing but our idea and our ideal of the highest goodness and the highest understanding. An idea and an ideal. When ‘Socrates’ is asked in the *Republic* to say what the Form of the Good is, he takes refuge in allegory. Plato knew that the reality sought by the philosopher is not to be found outside of us and that the reality within us cannot be objectified except in allegory and myth — allegory and myth which the mind must create because that is its means to be in touch with its inner reality but must also destroy to remain free of superstition. In the *Republic* Plato relegates all natural science to the lower segment of the higher division of the Divided Line. He knew that any objective knowledge

that presumed to transcend the shadows of the phenomenal world is illusion. That is my reading of the *Republic* Books V-VII, which is the crown of Plato's philosophy in my view. If it sounds enigmatic in this condensed paragraph, my excuse is that what I tried to expound in book after book cannot be put more clearly in a few lines.

To return to the topic of sophisticated and naïve philosophy, I would say that what is presented in philosophy departments of universities today may be very good science but it is as far removed from philosophy as biology or astrophysics. Indeed, the best philosophy today may be found in literary essays, in fiction, in poetry, but not in academic dissertations on philosophy, least of all in academic dissertations on Plato and his philosophy.

Every time I see philosophy defined as the science of this or the science of that, I feel enraged. The sciences pursued by academic philosophers study the object, even if that object is the mind objectified; philosophy proper examines the subject, is concerned with our inner reality.

## COMMENT ON “INTRODUCING FOLLIES OF THE WISE” BY FREDERICK CREWS

Posted on [www.butterfliesandwheels.com](http://www.butterfliesandwheels.com) on 16th June 2006

Whenever I try to comment on any of the varied forms of the science vs. religion controversy, I find myself in a very awkward position. Since I stand outside all of the contending camps, every one of the opponents assumes that I am aligned with the opposite side and I end up falling with bad company. Let me therefore state at the outset that I am radically opposed to all theology, supernaturalism, and otherworldliness. Hence I side with Professor Crews when he attacks all varieties of pseudo-science; and yet I find that I have a quarrel with his general stance or perhaps with his emphasis.

Professor Crews writes, “We chronically strain against our animality by inhabiting self-fashioned webs of significance – myths, theologies, theories – that are more likely than not to generate illusory and often murderous ‘wisdom’.” I love this. In fact I have been saying it in almost the selfsame phrasing in all of my published books and in many of my published articles. But I suspect there is an important difference of attitude between us here. I glory in the web of myths and theories I inhabit and see that as what constitutes my humanity. As a human being I live in a dream world of our own making, including the  $E=mc^2$  which you can never locate anywhere out there in the objective world but is a formula created by Einstein’s mind, with which we can work wonders with the phenomena of the world. The “illusory and often murderous ‘wisdom’” that our myths generate are, in my view, a necessary hazard which we must be prepared to face and for which there is a

remedy. The remedy is to acknowledge that our myths are myths, that our theologies are fables and fairy tales – some beautiful, some atrocious –, and our theories .. well, ‘theory’ is too flabby a term: theories of physics, theories of economics, theories of education, theories of medicine differ widely, but in the end they are all conceptual schemes that enable us to deal with natural phenomena.

In my view, those who oppose or try to curb the claim of scientific empiricism to have sole jurisdiction over factual questions – both the theologians with whom I have no sympathy and the idealists with whom I sympathize – defeat themselves on two counts: first by making truth-claims and secondly by venturing into the perilous arena of causation. Both ‘truth’ and ‘causation’ are slippery, much entangled themes surrounded by much confusion. Fortunately (for me), I do not have to touch these hornet nests. I surrender both fields unconditionally to empirical science.

If a poet were to say that poetry is a vehicle of truth, I would fully sympathize with her/his claim but say that s/he is foolish in using the term ‘truth’. Let us assign truth to objectively observable facts. Poetry is not concerned with facts. Poetry discovers reality, or rather, creates reality. (Don’t jump to my neck yet; hear me out.) I maintain that the same holds true of philosophy. Philosophy mistakes its proper character when it seeks or claims to lead to discoverable or demonstrable truth. Poets have the advantage over philosophers here in that poets are free of the error of most philosophers in confounding the role of philosophy with that of science.

At this point the scientific empiricist/materialist might say, “Well, if you reject entirely the claims of theology and even of metaphysics to objective truth, I have no problem with conceding you your poetical truth.” I wish it were as simple as that. For my main concern is to emphasize that our subjective life, that the myths we create, that the ideas, ideals and dreams we breed, are what constitute our distinctive character as human beings and our proper worth; that our ideas, ideals, and dreams are our reality and the sole locus of reality .. aye, there’s the rub! For just as I conceded to science all truth I want science to concede to poetry and philosophy all reality.

This is not to contend about a word. Humanity badly needs to sift its

values. As much as we need rationalism and freedom from superstition, supernatural illusions, and otherworldliness, we also need release from the false values of the materialist and worldly ideology and values that reign supreme even in putatively religious societies. Today, religion claims to be the sole custodian of spiritual values. We need a purely human spirituality. Science is not in essence or in principle opposed to that. But science in campaigning against the false claims of theologians and metaphysicians to objective knowledge, unwittingly shoves spiritual values into obscurity. We have to draw a clear line between the realm of objective fact, the domain of science, and the realm of ideals and values, the domain of philosophy, a philosophy that lays claim to no discoverable or demonstrable truth.

## PHILOSOPHY: WHO NEEDS IT?

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The discussion launched by David Large and Keith Parker raises a vital if, in a way, deeply disturbing issue, for it should make everyone engaged in philosophizing stop and ask oneself: Why do I do it? But – to anticipate myself – what is philosophy good for if not to be a Socratic gadfly?

So, instead of trying to answer directly David Large's question: 'Philosophy: who needs it?' I will begin by trying to answer, in the first place for myself, the question: Why do I philosophize? I think the honest, factual, answer is: I can't help it. It's a bug that has taken hold of me without asking my permission. In the Preface to my *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008) I confessed that the book was a personal testimony of a seventy-year-old man who throughout his life "has had one overriding and abiding passion — call it addiction if you will: the urge to find answers to questions that most sane people raise at an early stage of their lives then throw behind their backs to attend to the business of living."

Has my philosophizing made me wise or good? At this point let me step out of the confessional and re-word the question thus: Does philosophy make people wise or good (keeping back for the moment the question whether these are two things or, as Socrates would tell us, one and the same thing)?

The metaphor of exploration, favoured by Keith Parker, is good provided

we note that philosophy is inward not outward exploration. If wisdom or goodness were a mountain or a forest out there somewhere, then we could have settled the question empirically. But wisdom and goodness are not 'out there' but 'in here'. (How to interpret this 'in here' is another question we have to put aside for the moment.) And when we ask for the testimony of those who claim they have something to say about wisdom and goodness, they give us widely differing accounts. That is, even if wisdom and goodness are admitted to be goals sought by all, they turn out to be not the same for all people.

But this, to my mind, is not as negative a result as it seems to be. Different philosophers give us different visions of the good life and different pictures of the world; but they do, each of them separately, give us a unitary picture. What is the good of this? In my opinion, two all-important things (which in the end may not really be two but one thing). First, it gives some satisfaction to that terrible urge to ask questions and seek understanding. Many of us would agree that when that urge is denied satisfaction the result is either torment or torpor. Secondly, it is this life in the light of a unified *Weltanschauung* that is the distinguishing mark of a human being and sets humans apart from other living beings; and who wants to lose that birthright? (How to reconcile or choose between those different ideals and world-pictures is too large a question to go into in the present context.)

So to the question: Why philosophize?, the answer seems to be that some people are just born that way. There are those who are impelled by their nature to sing or paint or invent tales, and there are those who are impelled by their nature to ask themselves questions. And it so happens that all of these, when they each obey their peculiar imperative urge, render inestimable service to the society in which they live. The lyricist, the painter, the story-teller, add to our life beauty and joy and wisdom — yes, I credit poetry and art, rather than philosophy, with giving wisdom. The questioner, on the other hand, in subjecting our accepted notions and theories and beliefs to examination, spares us the fate of turning into fossils: for a species whose most effective tools in the struggle for survival are mental tools is inevitably doomed when those tools remain unchanged in an ever-changing world.

This brings us back to the Socratic gadfly, and so to the question: Who needs philosophy?, my answer is: The whole of humanity is in very bad need of philosophy, perhaps today, when we have so much of knowledge and so much of power but so little of understanding, more than ever.



## MINDS, BRAINS, AND COMPUTERS

Soon the term ‘personal’ in the expression ‘personal computer’ may become ambiguous. So far it has had the same meaning as in ‘my personal agenda’ or ‘my personal locker’. But soon it may also have the same meaning as in ‘Christians believe in a personal God’. Computers are threatening to become persons. Is that possible? What would be the philosophical implications? In what follows I do not seek to provide answers to these questions but to offer some thoughts that may help us think somewhat less confusedly when considering such questions.

Computers, as we have them today, may be said to be instruments of thought. Perhaps most people would accept this statement without demur. I mean by this that computers are aids to and extensions of our thinking in the same way as a screw-driver is an extension of my hand. The screw-driver cannot turn the screw; my hand alone cannot; supplemented by the screw-driver it can. But are computers thinking instruments? Are they likely to become at any future time instruments capable of autonomous thought? In an interview with Jeremy Webb published in the *NEW SCIENTIST*, 19 August 2000, Igor Aleksander, author of *How to Build a Mind* (Wedenfeld & Nicholson), says, “When they don’t understand something engineers try to build it. But there is an intended frisson in that you might expect to be able to build a brain, but not a mind, whereas I’m arguing that a mind is an emergent property of brains one might build.” [My quotations are from the electronic version of the interview for which I am indebted to the PhilosophyNews website.]

There are two issues here. (1) If we make a mind, by putting bits and pieces together, does that mean we understand what a mind is? (2) If we make a thinking computer, a computer with a mind, we may perhaps reasonably speak of that mind as an emergent property of the man-made brain, but what should we then understand by that? I believe that there we stand in danger of putting a perniciously wrong interpretation on our statement. (As these two problems substantially overlap and intertwine, I have not, in what follows, tried to package them out neatly.)

Scientists are happy to say they understand something when they know how it works or, better still, how to make it work. That may be one legitimate use of the word ‘understand’, but there is another sense of the word, a deeper one: I do not understand a gesture of love, a kind word, a smile, by analyzing it, but by feeling it. Maybe we can reduce a smile to chemical, neural, etc., analyses. But we lose much if we stop at that, thinking that we have fathomed the mystery.

The fundamental error of naturalism (materialism) is that it seeks to – and believes that it can – explain the realities of immediate experience in terms of objective actualities, which are the staple food of the ‘exact’ sciences. We are in danger of believing ourselves, becoming confirmed reductionists, and being blinded for ever to the mystery, which is all the reality. We would then be things, clever things, living among things, but would no longer be persons. That would be the end of all poetry and genuine art.

A man-made brain that can think and act autonomously would not provide an argument for reductionism. A laboratory-made organism does not prove that life is nothing but a combination of chemical elements. A poem is a collection of words but its reality is not reducible to the words that constitute its body. Emergence must be understood in the light of the principle of creativity, that all process is creative and engenders a reality that is not reducible to the material out of which it developed.

We should not speak of ‘the mind and the brain’. Rather, in the same way as Spinoza spoke of ‘God-or-Nature’ we should speak of ‘the-mind-or-the-brain’ as one whole inseparable reality. The physiological brain is not the mind. It is only the brain-in-action and in unison with the whole body that is

mind. That is the element of truth in the theory of the identity of mind and brain, but when the identity is taken in a reductionist sense, when we say that the mind is nothing but the brain, we lose sight of reality. We also err if we think of the mind and the brain as two entities rather than two concepts. The distinction of mind and brain, like all ideal distinctions, is a fiction, necessary for theoretical thinking, which, if taken as final, breeds error. Either concept taken alone is a mere abstraction; either taken separately for the whole involves falsehood.

In the *New Scientist* interview, Aleksander says of his Magnus, “It learns what [various objects] look like. It has an internal depiction of what these things look like so when I say cup, it would visualise internally a cup. ... It produces images on a screen. And these images tell us if it’s imagining properly or not.” When I tell a computer to ‘imagine’ something and it produces the required image, that shows that it has the capacity to put together various elements to produce an image, and there is nothing to prevent us calling that imagining, but that does not tell us that the computer has subjectivity. I am not arguing against the possibility that at some point computers may attain subjectivity. My point here simply is that when we use a word like ‘imagine’ we should be clear as to what exactly we are speaking of.

To mimic purposive action proves nothing, shows nothing. The mystery is in initiating the action, in the will, which is a creative act. Likewise instinctive action in animals or insects proves nothing. We do not know what goes on in a bee’s head, or in God’s head when directing the bee, but I know what goes on in my head, and that is what no reductionist analysis can explain. Subjective experience, the mind in action, creative intelligence, is the one reality we know immediately.

So, if and when (and it may well be more a question of when than if) we make a computer that is completely autonomous, we will not thereby have usurped the throne of God. We will only have prodded ‘God or Nature’ (to resort once more to Spinoza’s seminal phrase) to make anew, in a shorter time, what It had made before more leisurely. But if the new Phronetes, or whatever its parents may christen it, is completely predictable in its doings,

then we will not have really made anything new. It will still be a machine. Only if it is capable of creativity can we say that we have induced God to give us a new sister or brother, not essentially different from one who may any day come to visit us from some nearby or far away solar system.

## SCIENCE AND THE MIND

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<http://www.shef.ac.uk/~ptpdlp/newsletter/> ]

“I think, therefore I am”, said Descartes. Why “therefore”? As if my being could be in doubt and needed proof, whereas my being – and specifically my being as a self-conscious mind – is the most evident reality for my self. And if Descartes thought his *Cogito* proved more than the reality of the immediate awareness of our being, then the conclusion was not adequately grounded.

But Descartes was not really interested in establishing that conclusion. He was using the *Cogito* as a model of the axiomatic evidence that should characterize all trustworthy reasoning. Yet that – the criterion of clear and distinct ideas as a test of truth – was nothing new; it had always been the standard proceeding of mathematics. What was new and what spread and seeped into the philosophical thought of the following centuries and vitiated it was the implied split between the I that thinks and the I that is, as if the thinking I were one thing and my being another. Whereas, as a knowing being, my knowing is my being and my being is my knowing.

The split implicit in the *Cogito* was a twin to Descartes’ explicit and better-advertised bifurcation of mind and body, and, in my view, was no less damaging. I hold that all the fruitless travail of modern philosophers with the quandaries of self-body, mind-brain, and the like, springs from our taking these distinctions for more than working fictions. To think, we have to break up a whole into distinct aspects – substance-attribute, subject-object, knower-known, etc. – but to take these aspects as having any reality apart

from the whole is to be deluded and to fall into endless error.

As if the Cartesian double-split between mind and body and between knower and object known were not bad enough, the British Empiricists thought that the objectively given is all we need to bother about. Rationalists and Empiricists thus unwittingly joined hands in perpetrating the mind-body problem which I see as a pseudo-problem. While Empiricists, if they concede to mind any kind of being at all, see it as an epiphenomenon that we can simply disregard, Rationalists having split the integral act of knowledge into knower and object known, forgetting their own edict of separation, try to see the knower as an object.

Now neuroscientists, philosophers of mind, and psychologists are in a flurry looking for the mind (or consciousness or the soul or whatever). I believe they will continue to labour in vain so long as they fail to realize that our mind is our reality, and that it is a reality that is not amenable to study by the methods of the natural sciences.

To speak of consciousness as a phenomenon is already to have gone astray. We can surely study the phenomena of consciousness by scientific methods, but the phenomena of consciousness are not consciousness. Consciousness gives rise to the phenomena of consciousness but transcends those phenomena. It is meaningless to ask, What is consciousness?, as if we could define consciousness in terms either of what is not consciousness or of the content of consciousness. It is meaningless to ask, What am I? [= what is a person?], for, except in a biographical intent, I am not definable in terms of the present content of my experience (let alone of my physical being) or in terms of what I was or what I will be: I am just this moment of living intelligence that utters the I.

Those who speak of mind as a negligible epiphenomenon do so because they proceed from the presupposition that only what is objectively given is 'real'. But it is the nature of mind not to be an object: yet that makes it not less but more real, if we may be permitted to speak in this manner. That is why I insist that we have to make a radical distinction between the meaning of reality and the meaning of existence.

In my philosophy what exists (what is given) is not real, and what is real

does not exist: but there is nothing existing that does not secure its existence in reality, and there is no reality that is not actualized in some manner of existence. These are two dimensions of being, without which nothing could be. (This condensed statement necessarily sounds enigmatic, but it is not intended to be paradoxical or to mystify; it only sounds enigmatic because in my terminology ‘reality’ and ‘existence’ have special senses which I find it necessary to distinguish. See *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008), Bk. Two, ch. 2, “Dimensions of Reality”.)

So to the question, Can science solve the puzzle of consciousness?, my answer is, Science cannot. Does that mean that the puzzle will remain unsolved? No, for in fact there is no puzzle. Science creates the puzzle by trying to turn mind into what is not mind. Once we realize that mind is mind and nothing else, the problem vanishes. It is often asserted that the problem is a modern one, but I think it is the same problem that lay at the base of what Plato called the Battle of the Gods and the Giants, or of Idealists and Materialists. (*Sophist*, 245e ff.) Idealists seek reality in the verities of the mind. Materialists think there is nothing beside what may be observed objectively.

Jerry Fodor in a review of Joseph LeDoux’s *Synaptic Self* (*Times Literary Supplement*, May 17 2002) finds fault with LeDoux’s work and with much current neuroscience in that “the models of the brain [they are] building are designed to implement a cognitive psychology that nobody with any sense has believed for decades.” I think that the trouble goes much deeper. Fodor rightly maintains that the question, “What makes us what we are?”, interpreted in terms of the philosophical problem of personal identity, “isn’t one that it would be reasonable to expect brain science to answer.” But are there any philosophical questions that brain science – or any science, including ‘cognitive science’ – can answer?

Fodor suggests that the question: “What is going on in your brain when you think about what is going on in the world and decide what you are going to do about it?” is the “big question” that neuroscience should address. The question thus formulated may possibly outline a good – or the best – programme of research for that science. But that research, however fruitful,

will not give us an answer to the parallel philosophical question: “What goes on in your mind when etc., etc.?” The answer to this latter question can only be in terms of ideas, not in terms of descriptions of observable and measurable phenomena and processes. The mind (consciousness) is not an object amenable to scientific study, but is a dimension of being that can only be understood by a philosophy that recognizes its radical difference from objective science.

To express my position bluntly: I believe that thinking and neurological events pertain to two distinct and incommensurable dimensions of the one, whole, mind-body thing we call a person. Our subjective life is a reality not reducible to brain structure or brain processes. No knowledge gained in neuroscience or in genetics, however great, can help advance our understanding of the mind or the human being any more than advances in, say, astrophysics can. All science deals with phenomena and processes extraneous to the quite distinct world of ideas, ideals and values that constitute the reality of the mind and the specifically human realm, which is the concern of philosophy.

On the other hand, I think that what is wrong with cognitive science is that it hovers in a no-man’s-land between philosophy and science. It can either be good as science, raising questions about observable phenomena and processes, or good as philosophy, raising questions about meanings and values, but by trying to be both it gets lost in a maze of unsolvable riddles. Unless we recognize the radical difference between philosophy and science, both our science and our philosophy will continue to suffer.

What is the alternative to the vain attempt to get to the mind through the brain? Is it the view that the mind is a ‘soul-stuff’ of some sort? The trouble lies in the word ‘stuff’: however much we refine that stuff, as long as it is regarded as something objective, it will fare no better than the brain. Why don’t we accept the simple solution that stares us in the face — that mind is in fact the reality we know best and most immediately? Or, as I would rather say, that mind is the only reality we know and that it cannot be reduced to anything else? And we lose nothing by this: we would still have our neuroscience that can go on progressing indefinitely and we would still have



all the objective truths we have ever had or can ever have; only we shall have to acknowledge that these will never explain the mind any more than any facts can ever explain the colour of a single flower.

We can perhaps say that brains become minds; or, to put it in a deservedly more flowery manner, brains flower into minds. But I will not say that brains generate minds. Brains become minds in a creative move, just as all becoming is creative, just as the coming into being of a sonnet or a symphony is a creative move. Earth and water and air and sun become a red rose, but the colour and the fragrance of the rose are realities in their own right and cannot be reduced to what went into their making.

Shall we find the alternative in diving down into the ever receding depths of the constituents or the basic structure of the physical world till we reach a level where matter is no longer material but dissolves into mathematical equations and concepts? I would still say, No; for these would still be objective givennesses that will never yield the subjectivity of mind.

Philosophers, baffled by the irreducible realities of the subjective sphere, invented the word qualia. That was good as far as it went, as far as it was an acknowledgement of the reality of those realities. But then they went on to apply to qualia the same reductionist methods that they had been applying to mind, with the same result.

The reality of mind will remain a mystery, just as Being will always remain an ultimate mystery; and the ideal content of our minds can be understood in terms of – and only in terms of – the ideas created by those very minds.

## PLATO'S ANSWER TO ALAN TURING'S QUESTION

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[http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_128.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_128.html)]

In October 1950 the philosophical quarterly *Mind* published a paper by A. M. Turing under the title “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”. The first sentence of that paper read, “I propose to consider the question, ‘Can machines think?’”. (1) Six years later the paper was reprinted in an anthology, *The World of Mathematics*, edited by James Newman, under the title “Can a Machine Think?” Ever since there has been a torrent of publications around that question and it has given rise to what is known as the Artificial Intelligence project. Now, fifty years after that epochal reprint, Mark Halpern has published a judicious study of the whole issue (2). Halpern blasts the claims of Artificial Intelligence enthusiasts and questions their right to pose as descendents of Alan Turing. To Mark Halpern I owe the incitement to offer the following thoughts.

For reasons that will become evident in the course of this paper, my treatment of the question is tangential to the Turing Test and to the questions it bred and the discussions it incited. I will readily concede it is not inconceivable that we may make a thinking entity or even an entity that loves and hates and composes symphonies and creates original poetry. My contention is that even after conceding that, there would remain questions that we have to be clear about.

Turing, having said it would be absurd to decide the question by

examining how the terms “machine” and “think” are commonly used, proposes that the question be decided by an experiment which he calls the Imitation Game but which has come to be known as the Turing Test. The idea of the test is simple: to set questions to a computer and a human being, both hidden from the questioner. If the questioner is unable to decide which answers issue from the computer and which from the human being, we conclude that the computer was thinking.

Turing expected computers to earn the description ‘thinking machines’ not on the basis of problem-solving capabilities but on the basis of demonstrating the capacity for answering questions in a human-like manner. That, as far as it goes, is sensible. We today have computers that perform in seconds mathematical operations that would take a team of mathematicians much longer to perform; this in itself does not bring those computers any nearer to being human-like. And yet Turing’s sensible proviso does not remedy the error inbuilt in the very idea of the test. In proposing to decide the question on the basis of objectively observable criteria, we remove all consideration of subjectivity and thus empty the question of all philosophical significance.

As often happens with questions that look simple, the question “Can a machine think?” is not a single question but is a conglomeration that can be separated into numerous questions which might receive different answers. To think clearly we need to separate these different questions.

In what sense can the Turing Test determine whether a computer is thinking? The answer to this question of course depends in the first place on how we define ‘thinking’. But I do not intend to pursue the question in that direction. I think it is not unreasonable to say that however we define ‘thinking’ it will be possible sooner or later to programme a computer so that it will ‘think’ in the sense of the elected definition. But this would leave open what I regard as the more important question: Can the Turing Test determine whether a computer has subjectivity?

Again, whether or not we find the Turing Test providing a criterion for subjectivity, we would yet be left with a still more important question: What is subjectivity? For supposing we can devise a computer of such complexity

as to have its (her?, his?) own whims and moods and initiative, that 'computer' would be in the same position as a cloned human being — its subjectivity would be an 'emergent' reality not reducible to either the hardware or the software that went to the making of the computer-person. (I use the term 'emergent' hesitantly since it has been loaded with reductionist implications I cannot accept.)

What I am concerned to emphasize is that regardless of the process by which a person comes to be a person, it is the subjectivity of the person that is the locus of reality and value.

Approaching the question from a different angle, if or when neuroscientists succeed in completely mapping and artificially reproducing all the workings of a human brain (never mind the untechnicality of my language; I make no pretence to scientific knowledge; this does not vitiate my position), I would still maintain that the achieved autonomy and subjectivity would be creative in a double sense: (1) it would be an instance of the creativity of all process in nature ('natural process' would be needlessly ambiguous), bringing into being a reality that was not there before, an original reality; (2) the 'emergent' entity would fulfil itself, assert its reality, in creative activity, in thoughts and deeds that bring into being what was not there before.

Marginally: supposing we made a fully functional brain of an intelligence equal to that of an Einstein, the being to which that brain pertains would not have human feelings, human emotions, human desires, unless it were integrated with a body of flesh and blood with the same hormones and enzymes and what not as anyone of us. But this is neither here nor there, for there is nothing to prevent there being 'persons' constituted differently from us that would experience feelings and emotions other than those experienced by us.

From the start and throughout Turing's paper it is evident that he had no doubt as to what the answer should be. The test was obviously not devised to help us find an answer to the general question "Can machines think?" but to calibrate particular computers to decide which one or ones come up to the

specified standard of thinking. And yet Turing's answer to his own question comes as frustratingly anticlimactic:

“The original question, ‘Can machines think?’ I believe to be too meaningless to deserve discussion. Nevertheless I believe that at the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted.”

If the question is reduced to one of determining the conventional usage of words, it becomes of little philosophical importance. Halpern points to a “glaring contradiction in Turing's position” since at the beginning of his paper he held that to seek an answer to the question “in a statistical survey such as a Gallup poll” would be absurd.

Halpern quotes psychologist Epstein as saying that “the sentient computer is inevitable.” Clearly Epstein understands sentience in behaviourist terms. With the advance of technology we can have computers that imitate human responses and human behaviour with more and more sophistication. But the question for a philosopher does not turn round what computers can or cannot do but round what computers do or do not experience, this question in turn involves the more fundamental one about what we understand by experience.

Moreover, factually, by the criterion of returning original responses, as Mark Halpern remarks, “no computer, however sophisticated, has come anywhere near real thinking.” But, as what I have written above clearly shows, I would not make much of that.

Lucretius's tumbling atoms do not remain tumbling atoms: they become Goethe and Heine and Shakespeare and Wordsworth. The question philosophy should answer is this: Which has the better claim to the title ‘real’, the dust that was Goethe or the living fire that even today sings,

Alles Vergängliche

Ist nur ein Gleichnis;  
Das Unzulängliche,  
Hier wird's Ereignis;  
Das Unbeschreibliche,  
Hier ist es gethan;  
Das Ewig-Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan — ? (3)

Plato had an answer to that question. I think it is the one answer that makes sense of human life.

#### FOOTNOTES

(1) Alan Turing's paper is accessible at:

<http://www.abelard.org/turpap/turpap.htm> and numerous other online sources.

(2) Mark Halpern, "The Trouble with the Turing Test", *The New Atlantis*, Number 11, Winter 2006, pp. 42-63, available online at:

<http://www.thenewatlantis.com/archive/11/halpern.htm> and a more detailed version can be found on his website, [www.rules-of-the-game.com](http://www.rules-of-the-game.com)

(3) All things corruptible / Are but reflection. / Earth's insufficiency / Here finds perfection. / Here the ineffable / Wrought is with love. / The Eternal-Womanly / Draws us above. (The closing lines of Faust, Part Two, tr. Albert G. Latham.)

## MY BRAIN AND I

Biologists, evolutionists, evolutionary psychologists have been busy with experimentation and research into human nature, behaviour, morals, beliefs. They study religious and philosophical issues and confidently expect science to explain spiritual experiences. Neuroscientists continue to probe deeper and deeper into the brain — human and other than human. That is all very good for science and may augur much good in the practical sphere. But, I am afraid, there is a fly in the ointment! False conclusions may be – and often are – drawn; false expectations are fostered; questions are rendered unanswerable because the answers are sought where they cannot be found. (See for instance:

[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121450609076407973.html?mod=hps\\_us\\_in\\_side\\_today](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121450609076407973.html?mod=hps_us_in_side_today) - <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/21575> - <http://walrusmagazine.com/articles/2008.09-the-other-darwin-mark-czarnecki-creationism-origin-of-the-species-evolution/> )

Thus neuroscientists continue to examine the brain in the hope, not of finding the mind, oh, no!, but of satisfying us – they are satisfied beforehand – that there is no such thing. And I readily grant them that: the mind is no thing; the mind is not even an entity if by entity we understand a definite or definitely fixed thing. The mind is the activity, the living fire that is kindled by the brain, that is inseparable of the brain and of the whole body, but is nevertheless a reality in its own right, over and above the elements and the processes of the brain and the body. But let me not run ahead of my argument.

Sandra Blakesless (“Flesh Made Soul”, *Science & Spirit*, March 1, 2008, [http://www.science-spirit.org/newdirections.php?article\\_id=740](http://www.science-spirit.org/newdirections.php?article_id=740) ) concludes her article by saying that “if our cultural upbringing has convinced us that God exists, we will interpret [our spiritual experiences] as proof of a divine power. But if we doubt that God exists, we will turn to science and hope that researchers will eventually learn how to induce spiritual experience in anyone who asks for it.” I think this epitomizes all that is wrong with current thinking about the mind-body problem: it confuses the issue in two ways, first by sneaking in the false assumption that either God exists or else the stuff of the phenomenal world is all there is, and secondly by ignoring the distinction between scientific and philosophical questions, assuming that all questions can be settled by the methods of science.

I am not a scientist and hence will not touch upon the brilliant work that is being done by biologists, psychologists, and neuroscientists. I will merely try to clear away some of the haze gathering around the good scientific research. And let me at once make clear that in maintaining that certain questions raised in the course of or in conjunction with such research fall outside the proper sphere of science and are not amenable to the methods of objective science, I am not aligning myself with those who see the mind or soul as something superadded to or infused into the body, coming from a source beyond or above or apart from nature. I maintain that apart from nature nothing ‘exists’ (though what I exactly mean by that would take long to explicate).

We are told, for instance, that recent research has shown that, in situations involving choice, the brain determines the choice before we consciously ‘make’ our choice. So it would seem that it is not ‘we’ who make the choice but our brain. (Whether the time-lapse between the brain-decision and the conscious decision be seconds or milliseconds is of no consequence.) Here we have to stop and reflect: what do we mean by we and how do we distinguish between ourselves and our brains?

But before I go into that, there is one point I have to make to put the question in proper perspective. I believe that the problem of free will is



unnecessarily muddled by identifying free will with choice. Choice, far from signifying freedom, is the consequence of an individual being placed in extraneously determined circumstances and always involves the weighing against each other of relative goods or of relative evils. The choice, when 'free' in the sense of being free of foreign coercion, is yet fully determined by antecedents. In true freedom, in the spontaneity of an act of love or of artistic creativity, there is never a question of choice. (In the case of artistic creation choice comes in only where the creativity lags or is hampered.) But even here the act is conditioned by antecedents. Freedom in this sense is autonomous spontaneity and creativity.

To go back to where we left off – my brain decides for me before I am conscious of making the decision. So what? I am walking along some uneven path; I trip and am about to fall down; my body makes the necessary adjustment and regains for me my balance; I couldn't for my life be able to explain how it did it. I step into the street to cross; a speeding car comes rushing; I step back in time to avoid being knocked down. I take a sip of water; I swallow; I am completely unaware of the very many and highly complex muscle movements involved. Was it my body that did all that or was it I? The question is fatuous. I am a whole which, when chopped up into segments is no longer I.

Further, none of us human beings is one person. Whether we speak of freewill or of choice, there is always room for the question: Whose freewill or whose choice? It is only the most fortunate of us that have their multiple persons coexisting in relative harmony and cohesion. But even those fortunate ones will often experience the tension and the stress between the needs, the claims, and the longings of their diverse persons, which need not be in conflict but which cannot all be satisfied or all satisfied equally within the essentially limited capabilities of a human individual.

But, it may be said, that is not the issue. The issue is whether my choice is pre-determined. All choice, indeed all behavior, and on a more fundamental plane, all becoming, is conditioned by antecedents. But the larger question of determinism involves assumptions that cannot be examined here. (See

“Free Will as Creativity”.) My beliefs, my prejudices, my childhood experiences, my indigestion, and the faces I encountered on my way here, all go into making my choice — but all of that is I and I am all of that. And again I have to stress that it is wrong to confound this with the problem of spontaneity and freedom.

Not only the higher specimens of poetry and imaginative literary creations are creatively spontaneous. In ordinary conversation – be it refined or banal, sophisticated or naïve – we do not stop to deliberate what words to use in constructing the sentences we utter. The raw intent, meaning, or image, emerging vaguely in our mind, unfolds creatively in distinctly formulated linguistic structures. The sentences I utter grow naturally, organically, out of the existent matter: my experience, my acquired thoughts, the input I received last from my interlocutor. My utterances grow out of that matter, yet it is I that give the utterance, and this I is not one with that matter but is something over and above, something transcending, that matter. The I that engages in conversation is the totality that is other than the total content. The I that gives the utterance is a creative agent that does not exist objectively but is the reality apart from which that which exists objectively can have no being. The I is my reality.

Again, thinking is not the best part of us, nor is it what characterizes us as human beings. Our intelligence goes deeper. There is intelligence in a smile that gives encouragement and in a smile that forgives. There is intelligence in the deep breath taken at the sight of a thing of beauty.

Perhaps we would not err greatly if we say that my brain is a computer. I can do things with a computer that I can hardly do with my brain. But there are things my brain can do that a computer cannot do. Yet my brain is not I. My brain cannot say ‘I’. Only I can say ‘I’. This I, like the values, ideals, feelings, dreams, that I know immediately in and only in the I, cannot be given objectively, cannot be subjected to observation or analysis.

What are offered as ‘scientific explanations rooted in the physical world’ are only accounts of occurrences in the phenomenal world and they are only

significant for and relevant to the phenomenal world. They have objective validity in the only sense in which there can be objective validity: they are objective because it is the nature of science to deal with objects, whereas philosophy can only look into the subject; its only sphere of vision is the subject.

In the mind-body problem, or the mind-brain problem, the controversy is wrong-headed because it asks the wrong question. The scientific question is, How does this state of things come about?, and science gives the right answer to its question. The philosophical question is, What is mind?, and philosophy answers, Mind is my inner reality. There is no other answer to the question. So far both science and philosophy are within their rights. Philosophy goes wrong when it tries to answer the scientific question and says that the mind is implanted by God or that the mind is there because we have a soul separate from the body. Science goes equally wrong when it tries to answer the philosophical question and says that the mind is such and such processes or such and such chemical or neural or electronic activity. The confounding of science and philosophy is the bane of human culture.

If evolutionary theory, let us say, gives a satisfactory account of the origination of the sense of beauty, does that explain away beauty or the sense of beauty? To say that would be crude reductionism. An objective account does not explain anything (except in an anaemic sense of the term). Beauty is only intelligible as an original dimension of reality, as a reality in its own right.

Evolution, we are told, made the male peacock's tail beautiful to attract the female peacock. Why is the female peacock attracted to the male peacock's tail? Not because it makes for survival — that may have been the 'purpose' of nature but it is not the 'motive' of the individual female bird. Shall we say the colours trigger certain chemical processes that give the bird satisfaction? Shall we say that the motley colours excite the bird's curiosity? These may be true objective accounts but they do not explain the satisfaction (= pleasure) or the curiosity. These remain subjective realities. In the end the

female is attracted because the tail is attractive — the tail is beautiful because it is beautiful, as Socrates said.

To take the objective account given by science of a certain feeling or emotion as the ‘definition’ of that feeling or emotion may be admissible for clearly specified purposes, provided that we do not equate ‘definition’ with ‘explanation’. A definition not only – in common with the objective account it encodes – exteriorizes, but it moreover abstracts, replacing actualities with tokens.

We run from a bear because we are programmed to run. The fear we experience is a by-product, but it is not reducible to the elements that occasion it. A robot can be programmed to react in the same way, but it would not have the experience unless it is ‘souled’ – which I do not hold to be impossible. What I insist on is that the robot would then have a spiritual life that has a reality the robot’s electrons and molecules do not share.

If we say that the spiritual is the divine that we discover in ourselves, must this be taken to imply that the spirit was injected into an originally spiritless, mindless, inanimate nature? As I see it, while the creationist claim is unjustified, the opposing naturalist reductionism is equally untenable.

When we hear of the neurophysiology of spiritual experience or when we are told of spiritual experiences artificially produced, we should ask, what meaning do we attach to the word ‘artificially’? If we mean ‘not spontaneously’, we should note that for a human being spontaneity is a relative thing. All our feelings, emotions, passions, whims, are occasioned by antecedent circumstances, near or far. In a sense, my elation at listening to Beethoven’s Ninth is artificially induced. Again, what counts is not the how but the what.

The creationist-evolutionist impasse is generated by the failure of both parties to acknowledge that they are dealing with two incommensurable dimensions of thought. The evolutionists err in failing to see that there is another way of looking at things. The creationists compound this error which they share with the evolutionists by superimposing on it a fatuous

world-view. Both creationism and evolutionism or stark materialism are equally inimical to an open-minded humanism and equally injurious to an understanding of the reality of the mind.

When dogmatic religion was debunked and science sought meaning in the objective world where meaning cannot be found, the quest for meaning was baffled. Nobody thought of turning to the only place where meaning originated, the only place where it can be found — within ourselves; for we, human beings, are the creators of meaning and of values. When we lost the God outside we should have turned to the God within us, which was the maker of God in the first place. But between dogmatic religion and reductionist science we were cheated of our inner reality and left soulless.

Indeed, I think that, more than the scientist who refuses to acknowledge the subjective, it is the theologian who regards the I as an existent thing given by another existent thing called God, who does most harm to the notion of the I that I care to affirm and emphasize. My I is my whole being; it is nothing apart from my physical actuality, including, of course, my brain. Of all philosophers it was Spinoza who not only had it right but also put it most clearly. In one dimension I am God; in another dimension I am Nature. My whole being is a moment in *Deus sive Natura*. My life becomes so much the poorer when I am forgetful of the dimension of my I that is God. It is in that dimension that I – to resort again to Spinoza – live *sub specie aeternitatis*, that in fact and strictly speaking, I live in eternity.

## SCIENTISTS AND PHILOSOPHY

“The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena.”

Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.371.

If a philosopher, with no special training in science, were to offer an opinion on a scientific question, s/he would quickly be laughed out of court and would soon lose respect and credibility in her/his own field. But scientists assume the right to speak boldly and with all the show of authority on questions which should properly only be discussed with due regard to their philosophical bearings. I have within the past few days come across two specimens which call for some comment. The first comes from Ernst Mayr, who is commonly acknowledged as the most eminent living biologist and the most prominent Darwinist since T. H. Huxley; the second comes from an article by John Gribbin, who, in his own words, is “someone who has been involved professionally in scientific research”.

In an interview on *EdgeVideo* Mayr says:

“One of my themes is that Darwin changed the foundations of Western thought. He challenged certain ideas that had been accepted by everyone, and we now agree that he was right and his contemporaries were wrong. Let me just illuminate some of them. One such idea goes back to Plato who claimed that there were a

limited number of classes of objects and each class of objects had a fixed definition. Any variation between entities in the same class was only accidental and the reality was an underlying realm of absolutes.”

[http://www.edge.org/3rd\\_culture/mayr/mayr\\_print.html](http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/mayr/mayr_print.html)

Now this is a gross misrepresentation of Plato. Plato’s so-called ‘theory of forms’ has been the subject of much controversy and much misunderstanding, but the gist of it may be put in this way: There can be no rational knowledge of the ever-changing particulars of sense, but only of the intelligible forms supplied by the mind. Brute facts which lie before our eyes dumb and senseless suddenly become infused with meaning when a genius hits upon an idea that embraces the facts in an intelligible formation. In his famous ‘divided line’ simile (*Republic*, 509d-511b), Plato accords the highest place to knowledge consisting of pure ideas only. All knowledge involving an empirical element he relegates to the lower section of the higher division of the divided line. Perhaps scientists will readily admit that, even where we have a well-tested ‘law of nature’, its application in any specific case always involves some inaccuracy and uncertainty.

Plato insists on the constancy and immutability of the intelligible form as a necessary condition for rational knowledge. The form in itself must be seen as immutable; else we cannot base any knowledge on it. That is one side of the coin; the other side, on which Plato insists with equal emphasis, is that no actual, particular instance is ever completely true to the form or is ever free of change and variation. Thus Plato’s insistence on the immutability of the intelligible forms is not belied by the facts of evolution as Ernst Mayr maintains. If, historically, theologians and others deployed the concept of essential forms as an objection to the theory of evolution, that does not show that Plato’s conception was faulty but that it was misunderstood.

Now to the other specimen. John Gribbin, writing in *The Guardian*, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1123948,00.html>, about his book *Science: A History* concludes with the following two paragraphs which I quote in full:

“One of the strangest arguments that I have seen put forward – apparently seriously – is that using a word such as ‘gravity’ to describe the cause of the fall of an apple from a tree is no less mystical than invoking ‘God’s will’ to explain why the apple falls, since the word ‘gravity’ is just a label. Certainly it is – in the same way that the words ‘Beethoven’s 5th’ are not a piece of music, but only a label which indicates a piece of music, and an alternative label, such as the Morse code symbols for the letter V, could just as easily be used to indicate the same piece of music.

“The word ‘gravity’ is simply a shorthand expression for the whole suite of ideas incorporated in Newton’s *Principia* and Einstein’s general theory of relativity. To a scientist, the word ‘gravity’ conjures up a rich tapestry of ideas and laws, in the same way that to the conductor of a symphony orchestra the words ‘Beethoven’s 5th’ conjure up a rich musical experience. It is not the label that matters, but the underlying universal law, giving a predictive power to science. And that’s why science is real, and objective, in a way that music, or art, can never be.”

The argument that the theory of gravity leaves the mystery of one body attracting another where it was is one that I have presented repeatedly in various forms, though I am not conceited enough to think that Mr Gribbin was alluding to or was aware of any of my writings. Let me assure Mr Gribbin that no one advancing such an argument could be stupid enough to mean that the theory of ‘gravity’ does not explain anything. What we mean is that the whole ‘rich tapestry of ideas and laws’ does nothing but what he justly says it does; it gives ‘a predictive power to science’; it tells us how things work, and that’s what makes science so useful (and often so pernicious), but it does not tell us what those things in themselves are. Let me quote here something that I once jotted down in my Scrapbook:

“Are we wiser than Thales? Thales says, ‘All things are full of gods. The magnet is alive for it has the power of moving iron.’ When we superciliously smile at such a ‘childish’ thought we should remind



ourselves that when we speak of gravitation and inertia and the theory of relativity we are merely evading the problem. We are manipulating useful fictions that pay. But we do not know what makes things move. Thales' dictum does not give us a fiction. The expression is necessarily mythical, for all language involves myth; but it places us face to face with the mystery of what we do not know."

When Mr Gribbin says that "science is real, and objective, in a way that music, or art, can never be", I must say: Begging your pardon, I think it is just the other way round. When I listen to Beethoven's Fifth I live in the music and the music lives in me; the theories and equations of the sciences are serviceable, and though various sciences can advance my life or ruin my life, they have no immediate, direct contact with my inner life. True, for many scientists the scientific quest is a passion, and then that quest is for them life — the quest, the activity, but not its 'objective' results.

## KEEP PHILOSOPHY UNMIXED

If I say that religious dogma and philosophy make a bad mix, perhaps only a few will feel inclined to quarrel with what I say. If I go on to say that science and philosophy make an equally bad, or even – if that were possible – a worse mix, hordes will pick up the readiest weapon to hand to assault me. So be it; I will not be terrorized! I will support the first proposition by a couple of illustrations from one, and the second by a couple of illustrations from two, of the most prominent Plato scholars in the twentieth century.

In his classic *Plato: The Man and His Work* (1926), A. E. Taylor, speaking of Socrates' life-mission, writes,

“His function is simply to impress on all and sundry the misery of the state of ignorance in which they find themselves ‘by nature’ and the importance of ‘coming out of it.’ How a man is to come out of this state of nature is not explained anywhere ..” (p.28).

I find this strange coming from a scholar as immersed in Plato as Taylor was. What could he mean by ascribing to Socrates the thought of a state of ignorance in which we find ourselves ‘by nature’ when every student of the Socratic discourses can see that Socrates' most unshakable conviction was that the remedy for this state of ignorance is within us, that we have only to look into ourselves, within our own minds, to find the understanding we need? And how could he so confidently assert that how “to come out of this state of nature is not explained anywhere” when we know that Socrates had made it his sole business in life to exhort young and old, foreigner and

citizen, to tend their souls, to cultivate virtue, to exercise reason, all of which was, for Socrates, truly one thing and the one way to come out of the state of ignorance?

How could he? Well, in a footnote appended to the words asserting that the way out of this state of nature “is not explained anywhere” Taylor says, “Naturally not. An answer to this question would raise the issue covered in Christian theology by the doctrine of ‘grace.’ We must not look for an anticipation of Augustine in Hellenic moral philosophy.” For all his tremendous scholarship, Taylor misreads Socrates’ position because he reads it through Pauline-Augustinian glasses, and so sees ‘original sin’ at the root of the ignorance that Socrates sought to dispel by reflection, and replaces the *gnôthi sauton* with ‘grace’ dispensed by divine will.

Commenting on this first passage from A. E. Taylor has taken more space than I had anticipated and so I will forgo commenting on another passage from the same source. I will merely make the bald statement that, in my view, Taylor’s interpretation of the *Phaedo* is completely vitiated by his reading too much of his own Christianity into the thought of Socrates. I will not defend this audacious contention here, but if I may be permitted this much arrogance I would invite the reader to compare Taylor’s treatment in Chapter VIII with mine in “Excursions into the Dialogues of Plato: IV. The Meaning of the *Phaedo*” (now included in *Plato: An Interpretation* as chapter 5).

I now go on to the more paradoxical of the two statements I began with: science and philosophy make an equally, or even a worse, mix. I will illustrate this by looking into Newton’s concept of power or force and examining the comments of two scholars of the highest merit – F. M. Cornford and H. D. P. Lee – on Plato’s approach to the concept.

To the scientists’ childlike interest in the curiosities of the phenomenal world we owe all the gifts and comforts of our material civilization. I am not a Cynic, am not living in a tub, and do not grudge scientists the gratitude and admiration rightly due to them. But the astounding successes of science in

the practical sphere have made, perhaps not the scientists themselves, but the common run of humankind, including the professors of philosophy who should have known better, claim for science what is truly beyond its reach.

In his prefatory note to *Republic* 528e-530c introducing the study of astronomy, Cornford writes,

“Some Pythagoreans called [astronomy] ‘Sphaerics,’ since it dealt with the motions of the heavenly bodies considered as perfect spheres moving in perfect circles: there was no question of physical forces causing the movements” (p.246).

Desmond Lee, in the Introduction to his translation of the *Timaeus* and *Critias* (Penguin Classics) takes Plato to task for assuming that motion needed a force to cause it.

“He lived in a world where there were no machines, in which there was little wheeled transport, and in which such concepts as velocity, mass, or acceleration were not and could hardly be understood” (p.12).

Well, I flatly deny that there is anyone on earth who understands ‘such concepts as velocity, mass, or acceleration’. These concepts are tools that scientists employ to predict and to manipulate happenings in nature. In support of my bold claim, I will produce no less a witness than Isaac Newton.

Newton bases his *Principia* on a number of definitions and axioms. Among the definitions we find: “The quantity of force arises from and is measured by a combination of velocity and quantity of matter.” Newton speaks of quantity of force and its measurement: not a single word about what force is. Among the axioms we have: “Every body continues in its state of rest or of moving uniformly in the same direction except in so far as it is compelled to change that state by impressed force.” The definitions and axioms were neither observable facts nor deducible truths. Their only merit was that they could be worked into formulae that gave fairly correct

calculations of the movement of bodies, terrestrial and celestial. The great Newton knew exactly what he was doing. In the *Principia* he writes: “Hitherto I have not been able to discover the cause of these properties of gravity from phenomena, and I frame no hypotheses.” More revealingly, in a letter to Bentley he writes: “That gravity should be innate, inherent, and essential to matter, so that one body may act upon another at a distance through a vacuum ... seems to me a great absurdity.” (Quoted by Preserved Smith, *The Enlightenment*, 1934, 1962, p.47.)

Newton understood well – far better than many professional philosophers — that his great scientific work did not provide answers to philosophical questions. True, Newton indulged in philosophizing of a sort. His philosophy was as bad as his science was good, because in handling philosophical questions he did not do so philosophically but borrowed his views from institutionalized religion without question, but, to his credit, did not mix his science and his philosophy.

I quote at some length the following excerpts from Whitehead’s *Process and Reality* because they convey what I want to say, in the words of someone qualified to speak of Newton as I am not:

“The *Timaeus* of Plato, and the *Scholium* of Newton ... are the two statements of cosmological theory which have had the chief influence on Western thought. To the modern reader, the *Timaeus*, considered as a statement of scientific details, is ... simply foolish. But what it lacks in superficial detail, it makes up for by its philosophic depth. If it be read as an allegory, it conveys profound truth; whereas the *Scholium* is an immensely able statement of details which ... can within certain limits be thoroughly trusted for the deduction of truths at the same level of abstraction as itself. The penalty of its philosophical deficiency is that the *Scholium* conveys no hint of the limits of its own application. ... It is the office of metaphysics to determine the limits of the applicability of such abstract notions.

“The *Scholium* betrays its abstractness by affording no hint of that aspect of self-production, of *phusis*, of *natura naturans*, which is so prominent in nature. For the *Scholium*, nature is merely, and completely, there, externally designed and obedient” (*Process and Reality*, 1929, corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, 1978, p.93).

Philosophy and science even when apparently dealing with the same thing, even when they pose questions that superficially seem to be identical, are in fact asking essentially different questions about radically distinct aspects of the world. The failure to distinguish clearly between science and philosophy and to keep them separate is, in my view, a primary source of much bad science and much bad philosophy.

## EXPLAINING EXPLANATION

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[http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_135.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_135.html)]

The ambiguity of the notion of explanation is responsible for much of the failure of understanding characterizing controversies between scientists and philosophers. Distinguishing clearly the various senses in which the verb ‘to explain’ and the noun ‘explanation’ are used or could be used should go a long way if not towards settlement then at least towards a clearer understanding of the issues involved in many such controversies. In this note I will try to do something in that direction.

In what ways do we seek explanation or speak of explanation? Leaving aside the case of ‘explaining’ a difficult piece of writing, where we may more properly speak of elucidating, clarifying, or simplifying, we can separate the other instances into two distinct classes: the class of cases where we seek to explain how and the class of cases where we seek to explain why. In my opinion, these are radically different and it is vitally important to be clear in our minds about the distinction since confusion between the two different meanings of explanation is responsible for much of the misunderstandings we encounter in dealing with scientific and philosophical questions and in discussing the relation between science and philosophy.

Let us look at some examples of questions leading to ‘how-explanations’ on the one hand and to ‘why-explanations’ on the other hand and try to see what kind of ‘understanding’ each of these classes yields: for the same

ambiguity that envelops the term ‘explanation’ also envelops the term ‘understanding’ with similarly unfortunate consequences.

Recently physicists have been fighting among themselves about string theory(1). For some two decades now prominent physicians have been promising to explain the universe in a limited number of complex equations. Some of them are now saying that all efforts in that direction have ended in a *cul-de-sac*. But I don’t think that these any more than the ones who remain sanguine about the prospects of the theory have realized in what way the idea is basically flawed. (I am not qualified to discuss the debate between the two parties. I speak as a complete outsider.) They have not rid themselves of the illusion that it is theoretically possible to discover a single formula or group of formulae that will ‘explain’ everything. This is basically the same old dream of the Pythagoreans who, having discovered that the musical scale could be expressed in a mathematical formula, thought that numbers could yield the final explanation of everything. (Number has indeed enabled us to manipulate practically everything, but not to understand anything.)

Both Newton and Einstein were wiser than to think that they had explained anything by their wonderful equations. They knew that their equations were tools for managing the phenomena of the natural world but could explain nothing.

In the *Principia* Newton wrote: “Hitherto I have not been able to discover the cause of these properties of gravity from phenomena, and I frame no hypotheses.” Again, in a letter to Bentley he wrote: “That gravity should be innate, inherent, and essential to matter, so that one body may act upon another at a distance through a vacuum ... seems to me a great absurdity.”(2)

It is the same story with neuroscientists and psychologists and pundits of the new-fangled theory of mind. They can (a) give descriptions of observed phenomena and processes and (b) produce theories that range observed phenomena in patterns that have intrinsic intelligibility. That is all objective science and all theory can do. The mystery, the reality, underlying the phenomenal processes and happenings, can only be grasped in the



immediacy of living experience. Mind is just my inner reality; irreducible, unexplainable — it cannot be spirited away.

Professor Pluhar, in the Introduction to his translation of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (3) writes, "John Locke [1632-1704] argued for the existence of a perfect God on the ground that the self-evident existence of oneself, as a mind capable of perception and knowledge (which cannot arise from mere matter), presupposes such a God. For 'whatever is first of all things must necessarily contain in it, and actually have, at least, all the perfections that can ever after exist ...'."

This is an aspect of Locke's thought that seems to have been overlooked, forgotten, wilfully dumped away, or 'generously' excused by Empiricists, who make Locke the dean of their materialism. Nowadays evolution is seen as sufficient to explain all novelty. Nobody stops to consider that evolution may tell us in what manner, by what steps, things have come about, but it does not tell us how that was possible. They do not consider that the scientific study of evolution may give us information but cannot give us intelligibility.

For instance, evolutionists have attempted to 'explain' the beauty of bird-song as an evolutionary trait that helps survival.(4) Granted that the beauty of the song of the male bird attracts the female and so helps reproduction. But what makes the female bird respond to the beauty in the song of the male? Let us say that the female's response to the more appealing song ensures mating and consequently the survival of the species. The question remains: What makes the song appealing? Perhaps we have to rest with the answer that the female bird just loves the melodious sound. But even if we say that the sounds of the song produce physical vibrations in the female that trigger certain chemical processes, etc., etc., we can still ask, what makes the song beautiful to us? What is the attraction of the skylark to a Shelley or of the nightingale to a Keats? The song is beautiful and that's that. We cannot go beyond Socrates' 'foolish' "It is by Beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful." This is no answer and yet it is the only answer that gives us understanding since it is the answer that puts us face to face with the idea of Beauty as an ultimate mystery.

Further in the Introduction to Kant's third *Critique*, Professor Pluhar writes that Kant said that "it is inconsistent for Locke, as an empiricist, to argue to the existence of something beyond the bounds of all experience." I think that Kant's criticism, though sound in principle, does not do Locke full justice. Locke may have been guilty of thinking that his reasoning related to an existence "beyond the bounds of all experience", but his reasoning had a profounder significance as the postulation of a ground for the intelligibility of experience. Hume's radicalization of Locke's position, by revealing the inadequacy of empiricism when taken as a complete theory of knowledge, called forth Kant's critical solution. But Locke's 'inconsistent' position was richer in insight.

It's the same with the ultimate mystery of the universe. The Big Bang may be described, may perhaps be captured in reflections of the remotest constellations or whatever, but all that will not tell us what it was that banged in the first place; and even if the Bang is reduced to an insubstantial equation, as all matter seems to have been reduced, that will only put us face to face with the ultimate mystery of Being, quizzing us with the ultimate question: Why should there have been anything rather than nothing?

At this point I have to address a possible perversion of my position. When I seek to limit the jurisdiction of science, it is not in the interest of theology or religion. Theologians can vie with the best of scientists in rationality and consistency of thought. Their sin is the hubris of believing that they possess the truth. It is a sin that many scientists share with them; but scientists are more fortunate in that their object of study, the observable world, has a habit of reminding the scientists that she is greater than their theories, while the hidden object of the theologians does not show any interest in correcting their errors.

Science, dealing with the world as objective, as external to the mind, as given, can work on nature, but cannot – in Kantian language – approach the noumenal. The mind, in itself and by itself, can examine its own ideas, disentangle them, clarify them: that is the realm of philosophy proper; it cannot yield facts of the objective world that can be discovered, observed, or verified. As I have been repeatedly affirming in my writings: Philosophy

does not give us truth but gives us meaningfulness. On the other hand, science gives us facts, gives us truth, but no understanding.

Science and philosophy came into the world as Siamese twins, but they have to be separated if either is not to hinder and corrupt the other. It is in the best interest of both science and philosophy for scientists and philosophers to realize that theirs are two domains that are radically distinct, and that just as philosophy, by reasoning alone, cannot answer questions that are proper to science – questions that relate to the actual world – so also science, by the methods of science, cannot find answers to questions proper to philosophy, questions relating to meaning and value and the ultimate why.

Philosophical understanding proper can only be defined by Socrates' principle of philosophical ignorance: philosophical understanding is radically distinct from knowledge: we can only have philosophical understanding when, in relation to the question for which we seek philosophical understanding, we renounce any claim to knowledge. This does not mean that in philosophical understanding we are condemned to wander in a haze of mystic obscurity. What it means is that to enjoy a life endowed with meaningfulness, we have to seek that meaningfulness in ideas creatively engendered by the mind, within the mind. These ideas shed meaning on the objective givennesses of experience, but they do not have their existence in the objective world.

So, if we are to speak of explanation in connection with both science and philosophy, let us say that science explains how while philosophy explains why. Let us further say that only science gives us knowledge: scientists will love that, but let them then accept also the rejoinder: only philosophy gives us understanding.

Notes:

(1) Here are a few links to recent discussions:

<http://www.newscientist.com/channel/fundamentals/mg18825305.800.html> -

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,23114-2214707,00.html> -

<http://www.americanscientist.org/template/AssetDetail/assetid/18638> -

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/03/14/MNGRMBBOURE1.DTL> -  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/story/0,,1890366,00.html>

- (2) I quote from Preserved Smith, *The Enlightenment 1687-1776*, 1934, ch. 2, “Newtonian Science”, p.47.
- (3) Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, translated, with an Introduction, by Werner S. Pluhar, 1987, p. lxxiv.
- (4) I am sorry I have lost the source and failed to track back to it.

## THE FATUITY OF EXPLANATION

The word ‘to explain’ is ambiguous. Well, what word isn’t? Apart from abstract symbols in a closed, artificial lingo, every word is ambiguous, and must be; otherwise it cannot function as bearer of all the nuances in its infinite applications. In every particular instance a word necessarily assumes a unique hue imparted to it by the particular context in which it occurs. And who will determine the limits or the extent of that context? Like a Leibnizean monad, every word, strictly speaking, reflects – or, let us say, though Leibniz would not permit us, is open to – absolutely everything in the universe.

That is why no word can be truly defined by terms extraneous to it. That is the secret of the Socratic elenchus that has eluded the pundits, beginning with Aristotle. The message of the *aporia* with which every Socratic elenctic examination ends is that definition is an impossibility; that the meaning of an idea is only to be beheld in the idea; that the beginning and end of philosophical understanding is encapsulated in Socrates’ foolish dictum: It is by Beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful.

That too must have been what Wittgenstein, after much travail, came to see in his late philosophy when he declared that “the meaning is the use”.

But that is not the theme I intended for this essay. For while all words are ambiguous and can lead to confused thinking, I mean here to speak of the special traps inhering in the word ‘explanation’.

In fact my present train of thought was triggered by the question: Can evolution, or, more generally, biology, explain morality? Does the genesis of morality explain morality? Or, taking the question to a higher level of

generality: Does the genesis of anything explain that thing? The answer to any of these questions depends on the sense in which we take the word 'explain'. When we admit having explained a thing, taking 'explained' in one sense, and then claim or assume that we have explained the thing in a different sense of the word 'explained', that leads to confusion of thought that can, and usually does, have grave consequences.

Going back to the question of morality and evolution, there are those who tell us that sympathy, cooperation, helpfulness, even self-sacrifice, have been found in the course of the struggle for existence to be beneficial, and have consequently been taken up in our biological make-up. So far so good. Then it is said that the existence of these traits in humans (and in many other animals) has thus been explained: and in one sense of the term 'explained' that is true. But then again it is said, understood, or implied, that such traits have thus been explained as natural phenomena on a level with the phenomena of hunger, thirst, and fright. Morality, as a 'natural' thing, is affirmed, assumed, or implied, to have no unique character and no special worth; it is only valuable because it helps us survive. Let us just go one step further along this road: if the only value of morality is that it helps us survive, then if in any particular situation our survival requires that we go against all morality, there would be nothing wrong in that.

All that comes from confusing explaining how a thing comes about with explaining what it is.

No matter how our moral attitudes and moral feelings have come about, the important thing is that those attitudes and feelings give us a quality of life, an inner reality, that we may rightly regard as that in us which makes us distinctively human and that is our whole worth and is all the good we can have in life.

Beauty also, we are told, is a product of evolution. The beauty of the male bird's song has been furthered by evolution to attract the female bird.

Question: Why is the female bird attracted by the male bird's song? Answer: "To ensure the survival of the species." Wrong answer, I would say. That is the effect of the attraction, not its *aitia*. The true answer: The female bird is attracted by the beauty of the song because it is beautiful — and, in Keats's

words, “that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” The sense of beauty, the feeling of beauty, is a reality, is a mystery that, to be understood, must simply, innocently, foolishly, be embraced in its pristine self-evidence.

Let it be that my inner reality was forged by an omniscient, omnipotent, transcendent person; let it be that my inner reality was haphazardly produced by Democritian atoms; let it be that my inner reality was encoded in the Big Bang; let it be that my inner reality is a spark from the divine fire from which all that be has come to be; one thing I find needing neither explanation, nor proof, nor verification: my inner reality is what I know certainly and immediately; it is what I am. Proof, verification, explanation, are for what is not wholly real, for the shadows in the Cave.

## FOUR NOTES ON RELATIVISM

### I

The newly elected Pope Benedict XVI (Cardinal Ratzinger) has brought to the fore the critical problem of the rival claims of absolutism and relativism in the governance of human life. Absolute truths and absolute values are advanced as both the support and the reward of religion.

Shortly after his election Pope Benedict was quoted in BBC News as saying, “We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its higher goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires.” With all due respect I submit that this is propagandist rhetoric. Let us experimentally replace the emotively charged words ‘dictatorship’, ‘ego’, and ‘desires’ in this sentence with others and see how the tenor is transformed: “We are moving toward a sane relativism which does not recognize anything as for absolutely certain and which has as its highest goal one’s own soul and one’s own ideals.” This becomes a defensible, though not an adequate, position. The inadequacy stems from the apparent isolation of ‘one’s own soul and one’s own ideals’ from the totality of life and humanity. This in itself is an illustration of how a relative relativism (as opposed to a nihilistic relativism) is a healthier stance than absolutism.

Let us begin by asking: Can a finite mind escape relativism? It would seem obvious – one could say axiomatic if the very word did not reek of presumptuousness – that a finite understanding cannot establish or entertain



an absolute judgement. Does this land us in a thoroughgoing relativism? This is a question that calls for nicely discriminating consideration if we are not to go to ruin between the Scylla of absolute dogmatism and the Charybdis of nihilistic relativism. It is a question that I have taken up in “Must Values Be Objective?” and elsewhere. The following note is simply a marginal comment.

If we admit that it is not given to our finite understanding to reach absolute truth and absolute standards, it might seem that one recourse open to us is to rely on a perfect mind to provide us with the absolute truths and standards that we need. This is the claim of all theistic faiths. The problem with this claim is twofold. In the first place, the various theistic systems, all equally laying claim to good credentials, produce discrepant truth-claims and diverging standards, and where they agree – as on certain moral maxims and values –, the same maxims and values are found to be affirmed by non-theistic systems. In the second place, and this is perhaps the weightier consideration, if we decide to overlook the discrepancies between ‘revealed’ truths and principles, as for instance by peremptorily opting for one ‘revelation’ against the others, the acquiescence in such a handed-down system of beliefs and values amounts to forfeiting our autonomy and all claim to personal dignity. Some people may find, indeed innumerable people do find, this an acceptable price to pay for the comfort it gives: with these it is pointless to argue.

Putting aside reliance on revelation while acknowledging that absolute truth and absolute standards – involving absolute judgements – are beyond the reach of our finite minds, can we still form judgements and maxims and embrace values sufficiently secure for the guidance of life?

I believe we can if we choose for anchorage two confessedly subjective principles: (a) our moral and intellectual integrity as our inalienable birthright and the whole of our worth; and (b) the affirmation of the intrinsic value of all life as the criterion for the rightness or wrongness of all action.

In the light of these two principles the actual historical and geographical relativity of moral codes and values and the notorious contradictions and incogency of philosophical views lose their sting. Indeed, by candidly

acknowledging the relativity of moral codes and standards and the ineradicable insufficiency of all philosophical positions what we lose in the way of certainty we gain in the humility and inward truthfulness necessary both for the life of civilized society and for the life of a wholesome individual.

## II

The atrocities of the recent London blasts [July 7, 2005] have brought to the fore once more the conflict between the need for security – the right of peaceful citizens to protection – on the one hand, and the need to safeguard the privacy and civil liberties of individuals on the other hand. No equation or calculus however refined or sophisticated can tell us where to draw the line between these two legitimate needs. The line will be and has to be a shifting one, shoved this way and that way by differing circumstances and under differing conditions. What is of the highest importance is to keep alive the awareness that the right of individuals to security and the right of individuals to liberty are equally absolute, though in our imperfect world they necessarily limit each other and neither can be allowed to reign absolutely. They are inviolable and yet we have to violate them.

Our sole worth as human beings resides in the insight we have into absolute values. But we are imperfect creatures living in an imperfect world and the values which light our path in life are dimmed and constrained by the contingencies of actual existence. Our actions cannot be the actions of gods. When we forget the humility proper to our imperfection, we fall into the brutalities of Talibans who obey the commands of Allah and the callous atrocities of officers who obey the commands of Authority in Abou Ghraib and Guantanamo.

The interminable controversies raging around problems involving the application of ethical principles are needlessly embittered by the erroneous assumption on all sides that such problems are amenable to neat theoretical solutions. In such controversies it cannot be the case that one side is in the right and the other in the wrong.

To say so is not to admit a thoroughgoing relativism. Let us take the question of abortion for instance. The preservation of the life of the unborn baby, at whatever stage of gestation, is an absolute value. The preservation of the life and health of the expectant mother is an absolute value. If we were in a world of pure ideals these absolutes would not conflict. But in the actual world absolutes come embodied in instances loaded with the imperfections of finitude and particularity. These particular instances will clash, even when they are instances of the selfsame value.

Such questions can only be discussed reasonably and fruitfully when on all sides we acknowledge that such problems are not open to neat logical solutions. Then and only then will each party approach the position of the other party with sympathy and understanding. Then we realize that no law or regulation can be formulated or devised to satisfy all claims to the full or to be applicable satisfactorily to all particular cases. Then we realize that every actual case cannot but be an individual instance of the general tragedy of life, the general tragedy of all existence, to be approached with the awe, reverence, sensitivity, and humility proper to the finite confronting a law of the Infinite.

### III

What is wrong with relativism? First I have to point out that I am not posing the question rhetorically but inquiringly. I intend to examine what is wrong with relativism but only in the context of exploring what is right with relativism.

Relativism is inescapable, since all actual existence, by the very fact that it is actual, is determinate and finite and therefore relative. I think this is the basic lesson of the *Parmenides* of Plato. But relativism as an outlook is itself relative: it is relative to the actual, the existent. The hub on which all our relative perceptions and relative judgements turn is the inner reality of the mind. It is the intrinsic worth of that inner reality that is the secure refuge of all value. You may change every law, infringe every maxim you lay down – for no fixed law or maxim can apply to every possible situation – as long as

you preserve the integrity of your inner reality and your inner worth.

But relativism does not mean that whatever anyone says goes; it does not mean that all opinions and all judgements are of equal value. That is part of what I mean by saying that relativism itself is relative. For every opinion and every judgement relates to a context and every context may relate to a wider context. Therefore, when I say that relativism is inescapable this does not mean that we have to admit the validity of the Protagorean 'Man the measure'. It is unfortunate that relativism has been wedded to the Protagorean 'Man the measure', whose limitations have been exposed by Plato in the *Theaetetus*. We have to distinguish between these.

So while any meaningful opinion or judgement – that is, any opinion or judgement that is not nonsensical, that has some measure of coherence – must necessarily have a measure or an element of truth, there must always be criteria for evaluating the opinion or judgement. The criteria in turn are necessarily relative, but they belong to a higher echelon in the ideal hierarchy that constitutes the intellectual constitution of an individual or a communal culture. It is such an ideal constitution that gives individuals and cultures their relative stability and integrity.

The concept of objective truth is only relevant to facts, to actual existents. Even there it has its limiting conditions, but let that pass for the moment. But in questions of value there is no fact – nothing which 'is the case' – external to the judgement, to which the judgement may conform or not conform as an empirical judgement may conform or fail to conform to ascertainable fact. Of course you can always reduce the judgement or connect the judgement to objective conditions. Someone says, Love thy neighbour. You may go on to show by observation, by statistics, even by laboratory experiment, that following this maxim actually results in comfort, prosperity, better health for all parties concerned. But that does not touch the moral issue. What if I am clever enough to secure for myself comfort, prosperity, and bodily wellbeing, while not only hating my neighbour but also actively harming her or him? You can only see that as wrong if you accept the Socratic notion that the most precious thing in you flourishes by doing good and withers by doing bad deeds.

## IV

What positive contribution have our professional and academic philosophers made to the major social, cultural, and political debates of our time? Have they in their pretended new sciences of bioethics, metaethics, and the like, been able to lay down valid principles or offer serviceable maxims for settling the controversies raging round such problems as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, cloning – to name a few issues that come to mind at random?

Doubtless many of them have made thoughtful, enlightening contributions to the discussion of such problems. That is not the point. My point is that in fostering the belief that the new-fangled ‘disciplines’ are capable of ever reaching rationally deduced definitive solutions to such problems, more harm than good has been done. In all such problems there are not one right way and one wrong way. All such problems issue from the ineradicable imperfection of all actual existence. In every such problem there is a conflict between two values where there is not room for the two together.

The sane, healthy, and beneficial way to deal with such problems is for each side of the controversy to sympathize with the other side, and for the two sides to try by compromise, by give and take, by trial and error, to reach pragmatic decisions and arrangements, always subject to revision and alteration.

On the contrary, assuming that such problems are capable, if only theoretically and ideally, of definitive philosophical or scientific solution, with the implication that there is an absolute right and an absolute wrong in such questions, only leads to intransigence and loss of the capacity for imaginative sympathy and understanding on both sides of a controversy. In this way philosophy, believing itself capable of reaching truth, instead of fighting dogmatism and doggedness, institutes its own dogmatisms and sanctified ideologies, breeding hatred and enmity and conflict instead of love and friendliness and harmony.

The only cure for this malady is the cure prescribed by Socrates: the

confession of philosophical ignorance. No one can possess the final and unalterable truth on any question. All we can do and all we have to do is to seek understanding – critical understanding of ourselves and sympathetic, loving understanding of our fellow human beings.

I had just written the above lines when I came across an article (“Tortured logic”, by Christopher Shea, *The Boston Globe*, December 18, 2005) discussing various opposed approaches to the so-called ‘ticking-bomb’ thought experiment designed as a test-tube case for examining whether torture may be permissible under certain circumstances. I confess that I find the very idea of this particular thought-experiment nauseating. I think that the mere idea of discussing the ‘permissibility’ of torture cannot fail to be as demoralizing as associating with torturers even if for the purpose of scientific research. But the thing is with us; there is no escape; I find it necessary to say my say.

In my opinion, the whole controversy over the question of torture is flawed because all parties think they can prove by argument whether it is ever right or never right to resort to torture for a good cause. Seeking to settle the question one way or the other by logical argument is wrong. Here there are distinct positive values involved that, in our essentially imperfect world, under certain circumstances, stand in irreconcilable opposition. To debate the question as if it could be decided once and for all, even if only theoretically, one way or the other, obliges the two parties to the controversy to negate one value or the other. What we need instead is to stress the ultimacy of the pure values and acknowledge that in practice there will be tragic situations where a positive value is inevitably sacrificed.

Those who seek to prove by logical argument that under certain hypothetical circumstances torture can be justified envelop in thick smoke an insight of human civilization dearly bought, that torture is degrading in the first place not so much to the tortured subject as to the society that finds torture acceptable under any circumstances.

Those who seek to demonstrate logically that under no circumstances is it right to apply torture, in thus advancing a rigid dogmatic stance make it impossible to weigh, where necessary, sacrifices and losses to avoid the

greater by accepting the lesser.

What are we to do then? I believe that, in the first place and above all, we must never legalize torture. To do that is to reverse the course of human civilization and slip into a bottomless abyss of degradation. But there may be circumstances in which a certain person is impelled to apply torture to save life. Shall we condemn that person then? I would not. That person was placed in a tragic situation where whatever s/he did would result in some evil. But it is harmful, it is soul-polluting, to spread the idea that under certain circumstances the application of torture is justifiable: to establish that as a principle is to introduce a deadly germ into the body of humanity.

Is my position logical? No. How could it be? The whole situation is a concoction of imperfection: nothing consistently good can be made of it. What we can and should do is to hold fast to our ultimate moral insights: life is good; pain is bad; pain in someone intending to injure a person dear to me is still bad; loss of life for an intending killer is still bad. When I find myself forced to do a bad thing that does not make it good, even though the act does not make me evil, yet it makes me miserable.

## ON SZLEZAK ON PLATO'S "UNWRITTEN TEACHING"

Comment on a review by Lloyd P. Gerson in the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*. <http://www.bmcreview.org/2008/08/20080843.html> (Posted on 26 August 2008).

I wish to comment, not on Professor Gerson's review, but on Professor Szlezak's position alluded to in the third paragraph of the review. It is true that I have not read Szlezak's contribution to the book under review, yet I have read his *Reading Plato* which, I suppose, represents adequately his fundamental standpoint.

Against Szlezak I would argue that Plato's objection to putting any profound philosophical insight in a written text applies with equal force to conveying any such insight in any fixed oral formulation. Plato's opposition to putting serious philosophical reflection in a written text was not esoteric in intent. He did not abstain from writing serious philosophical dissertations because he wanted to confine the wisdom disclosed to a select few, but because he believed that any determinate formulation of a philosophical point of view is necessarily inherently defective. Hence he insists that philosophical insight can only be attained in the live give and take of a dialectic that destroys (transcends, if you will) its own presuppositions. The *Lecture on the Good*, I would imagine, would not be a pontifical pronouncement of doctrine, but a hornet's nest of challenges and perturbing questionings.

Plato's profound and rich philosophical insights are not to be sought in



what his writings say, nor to be vainly chased in the phantom world of unwritten and, for us, unspoken, dogmata, but are to be garnered by creatively engaging with his writings as prophetic enigmas.

That dialectic should form “a central part of the unwritten teaching” calls for no argument, for dialectic is the soul of philosophy for Plato: indeed *dialegesthai* and *philosophhein* are interchangeable in Plato’s writings. This in no way supports the view that the ‘unwritten teaching’ was esoteric or that it incorporated a fixed body of doctrine. The ‘unwritten teaching’ – what Plato put through to his students in the Academy – could have nothing in the way of pure philosophy (that is, leaving aside mathematics and other specialized disciplines) over and above what we can derive – and what Plato, I believe, meant his readers to derive – from an imaginative reading of the dialogues.

If there had been a “doctrine of first principles contained in the unwritten teaching” that would have been just the thing Aristotle would have most firmly grasped, the thing most congenial to Aristotle’s special genius. Yet, for myself, I cannot find in what Aristotle ascribes to Plato anything worthy of being seen as the *crème de la crème* of any thinker worth his salt, let alone a Plato – barring the supposition that Plato had excluded Aristotle from the innermost circle of his students.

## PLOTINUS ON PLATO

Comment on Lloyd P. Gerson's review of Jean-François Pradeau (ed.)  
*Études Platoniciennes IV. Les Puissances de l'âme selon Platon*

[Posted on Bryn Mawr Classical Review Blog on November 22 2008:  
<http://www.bmcreview.org/2008/11/20081121.html> ]

I do not propose to comment on Professor Gerson's review. I merely offer some reflections evoked by the first paragraph of the review.

Plotinus was not wrong in remarking that what Plato said about the soul was enigmatic, regardless of the fact that Plotinus's own writings are enigmatic in the highest degree. Is there cause for complaint in that? I think not. A philosophical statement that is not enigmatic is of little worth. Philosophy deals with ultimates. All that is ultimate is in some significant sense absolute. What is absolute cannot be contained in a determinate linguistic statement — cannot be conveyed in fixed conceptual terms. Hence a statement claiming or seeking to give expression to a genuine philosophical insight cannot but be metaphorical, paradoxical, enigmatic or mythical. That is why (1) Plato asserts that the best philosophy cannot be put into any fixed text (*Phaedrus* 274b-278e, the Seventh Letter 341c-344a); (2) Plato insists in the *Republic* that dialectic must destroy all its hypotheses (*tas hupotheseis anairousa*); (3) Plato clothes his profoundest philosophical insights in myths, allegories, and enigmatic statements.

I maintain that myth in Plato extends far beyond the traditionally noted myths in several of the dialogues. The philosophical insight in the notion of

*anamnêsis* for instance, is smothered when this is taken as a doctrine and is quickened when it is taken as a myth: the fecund idea of education in the *Republic*, for instance, as the turning of the mind's eye inwards, can then be seen as one of the fruits of that myth. I will stick my neck out so far as to say that, where Plato is concerned, any 'textually based argument' is more likely to go astray than to penetrate to Plato's true intention. Plato's meaning is in the drama, in the whole, in the give and take of live dialogue, where, as Plato tells us in the Seventh Letter, "like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself" (341c-d, tr. Glenn R. Morrow) — not in fragments lifted from their natural milieu and subjected to laboratory testing.

Similarly, the idea of the soul and of the immortality – better still, the eternity – of the soul, taken as a myth representing what was for Socrates simply that in us which thrives by doing what is right and is harmed by doing what is wrong, gives insight into that inwardness, that locus of ideas and ideals engendered in and by the mind alone, which characterizes us as human beings and constitutes our whole worth, and which empirical and analytical philosophies seek to deny us. The soul as myth secures our spirituality, affirms the reality of spiritual life, assures us of the inward reality of spiritual values, endangered equally by the theological dogma of a separate and separable soul and by the reductionist approach of empiricism. (We then have no need to ascribe to the soul any 'entitative status'.)

In vain do we seek to fix in definitive form any Platonic solution, or any philosophical solution at all, to any problem posed by Plato. Plato poses a problem; considers it from this angle and that angle, and leaves it without a final conclusion; thus it remains good for exercising our own mind, for it is only in the active process of *phronêsis* that we may glimpse our inner, strictly ineffable, reality. This is the Platonic development of the Socratic elenchus which, *pace* Aristotle, was not meant to reach definitions but to produce the *aporia* that leads the mind to look within itself, where alone it can behold what is real.

I cannot do better than conclude by culling a sentence from Professor Gerson's article: "According to Plotinus, Plato taught that philosophy is the practice of self-transformation that is the achievement of self-awareness." This agrees completely with my interpretation of Plato's position, what I have elsewhere called my version of Platonism.

## THE POSSIBILITY OF METAPHYSICS

[The following was posted as a comment on a *Philosophers Magazine Blog* article entitled: “What is Metaphysics?”]

I had written the following note just before reading “What is Metaphysics?”. It is not therefore properly a comment, but still it is, I think, relevant.

Aristotle was not responsible for the introduction of the term ‘metaphysics’, yet he was responsible for the wrong direction the inquiry took and for all the misunderstandings that surrounded it. Aristotle was primarily a scientist: he wanted ‘correct’ answers to questions. Socrates had found that the investigation of the objective world of facts had nothing to do with or to say for the examination of values and ideals he was concerned with. He also found that questions not relating to the sphere of objective facts could not be answered but could be thrashed in questions and ‘answers’ that only raise further questions, but that through this apparently fruitless search both the questioning party and the answering party attain a measure of clarity within their own minds and that the *aporia* at which they end is translated into insight into themselves. Aristotle misunderstood this Socratic examination – the Socratic elenchus – and consequently represented it as a search for definitions, definitions which were never reached.

Socrates was interested exclusively in moral questions. Plato, who clearly understood that the Socratic *aporia* could not be – and was not meant to be – surmounted, and at the same time also clearly understood its positive value, passed beyond Socrates’ moral questions and posed questions about ultimate reality. He knew full well that these questions are unanswerable. But he also knew that not to ask these questions is to trivialize our mind and impoverish our inner life. The celestial realm of forms in the *Phaedrus*, the absolute

Beauty beheld through the ascent described in the *Symposium*, the Form of the Good in the *Republic*, are not ‘answers’, are not fixed ‘truths’, but are question-breeding wonders in wrestling with which our minds live to the full.

Aristotle in his *First Philosophy* (accidentally named ‘*Metaphysics*’) gave us an ideal system which exercises the mind as positively as Plato’s, but because Aristotle presented his system as true and demonstrable, it could, in the hands of a Thomas Aquinas, be turned into a system of beliefs that cripple the mind. We are then seemingly faced with the dilemma: either to follow the Empiricists and Analysts and live in a world of unintegrated fragments and depthless Humean ‘impressions and ideas’, or follow the theologians and subject our minds to revealed superstitions.

But the horns of the dilemma are brittle and can be broken. Wittgenstein at the end of the *Tractatus* frustratedly concludes that concerning that about which we cannot speak, we must be silent. This is regrettable pusillanimity. Rather, what we cannot speak about we must mythologize about, creating myths in which the world becomes meaningful to us and thus enjoy a rich spiritual life free of superstition, of dogma, of prejudice, of conceit, when we know with Socrates and Plato that every answer to a question must in turn be questioned, for philosophy, as Plato insists in the *Republic*, must constantly destroy all presuppositions.

This is the position I have been putting through in my writings, particularly in *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008) and *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005), a position which, being so alien to mainstream philosophical thought, naturally cannot be adequately expounded and justified in this short abstract.

## INDEPENDENT PHILOSOPHY

Throughout the past century academic philosophy increasingly distanced itself from the concerns and interests of common humanity until, during the past five decades or so, with very rare exceptions, the work of professional philosophers ceased to have any relevance to human life. It is not that academic philosophy became so abstruse or technical as to be inaccessible to lay readers. That in itself would not have been irremediable. Spinoza and Kant, for instance, wrote difficult texts that can only be negotiated by a dedicated and well-trained reader. But the substance of their writings was immediately and essentially relevant to the meaning and value of human life. The problem with the main current of recent and contemporary academic philosophy is that it plumes itself on being concerned with 'objective' disciplines and techniques and neglects or utterly denies the reality of the subjective life of humans which is the locus of all values and ideals.

Though there have been some protesting voices arising against this situation from within academic circles, what may in the end rescue philosophy from turning into a mere shadow of its true self, is that a number of independent philosophers are sprouting here and there all over the globe, trying to reach intelligent readers to whom academic philosophy has ceased

to be meaningful. Taking advantage of the immense possibilities of digital technology, they are speaking their word through e-journals, personal websites, and Print-On-Demand publications.

Of course the phenomenon of independent philosophers is nothing new. Even if we confine ourselves to modern philosophy, we can say without exaggeration that, by and large, the most important developments in philosophical thought were due to non-professional philosophers. Neither Descartes nor Spinoza nor Leibniz nor Locke nor Hume held university posts. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche taught for a while in universities but did their best work when they were on their own. Even Kant, who began his academic career lecturing on physics before being appointed professor of logic and mathematics, produced his epoch-making philosophical work ‘on the side’ as it were.

I referred to independent philosophers taking advantage of the possibilities of digital technology. It is obvious that these possibilities with their ubiquity and indiscriminate availability are open to the worthy and the worthless alike, and what is worthy is likely to be as a drop lost in the deluge of what is worthless. This is a problem that has to be faced, but it is not a problem that I intend to tackle here. Let us put our faith in the intrinsic potency of the good to survive. In this essay I present one of this group of independent philosophers who, hopefully, may succeed in bringing philosophy once again to relate to human life.

Richard Schain is not as completely unrelated to the academic horizon as some other independent philosophers are. Schain graduated at New York University (philosophy, medicine) and had neurology training at Yale. For a time he held a university professorship in neurology. But he had been enamoured of philosophy from boyhood and his choice of neurology seems to have been made under the illusion that he would thereby keep close to his first love. He discovered that neurology as an objective science and philosophy as the search for our inner reality are distinct. Disappointed of that fond dream, he resigned his professorship and devoted his time and energy to producing book after book and article after article in which he affirmed the reality and primacy of the subjective life of a human being.



In the preface to his *Radical Metaphysics* (2002) Schain defines the underlying theme of his philosophical project as “the task of building a metaphysical self”. He re-affirms this in slightly varied phraseology: “Virtually all of my writings ... represent an effort at developing a metaphysical consciousness ... a distinct form of being that is superior ... to material existence” (p.11). This metaphysical consciousness relates to the inner, subjective reality which is denied and negated by the materialist world-view which dominates our age. I would say that not even the religious masses are exempt from this dominance, for apart from the few for whom religion is a personal experience, most followers of institutionalized religions are fully under the sway of the materialist world-view. Their dogmatic belief in a non-material reality is not sufficiently vibrant with life to turn the mind’s eye inwards to discover its own reality, since the ‘reality’ they are taught to believe in is located externally to the person and the belief in that external ‘reality’ does not spring from within but is outwardly inculcated.

The emphasis on the development of the interior self presupposes that we be convinced of the reality of the soul, “one must intuit that the soul exists” (p.18). Schain accordingly finds himself poised against all the forms of reductionism that are currently rife among both professional philosophers and scientists. As a neurologist he finds himself opposed to the majority of his colleagues who think that the description of objective neural processes exhausts the meaning of mind or soul.

But Schain’s insistence on the primacy of subjective reality is not merely a theoretical stance. It is in the first place a protest against the culture of this technological age which smothers individuality and spirituality. A citizen of the country that ranks first in the world in scientific, economic, and technical achievement, Schain does not find a home for his soul there.

In *In Love With Eternity* (2005), Schain dwells on the idea of eternity, more specifically the eternity of the soul. Beside the insights of philosophers and theologians, he finds support for his view in the Einsteinian conception of time. He weds the idea of eternity to the idea of development of the self: “The task of an individual is to develop the spiritual self that will be his or

[her] contribution to eternity” (p.12). Eternity is a crucial concept in my own writings too, but while Schain equates eternity with personal immortality, I draw a sharp line between the two. But this is not the place to discuss the question.

Judging by his writings, Schain’s sources of inspiration spread over a remarkably wide span: Kierkegaard beside Nietzsche, Thoreau beside Schopenhauer, Sartre beside Berdyev, Goethe beside Paul Tillich. He writes passionately, as one would expect from someone whose object in writing is to build his metaphysical self. In *A Fanatic of the Mind* (1987) he writes, “No Greek philosopher was taken seriously whose life did not reflect his thoughts even though he wrote with the pen of angels” (p.12).

I have given this brief account of the philosophy of Richard Schain as an example of what I (perhaps too fondly) see as a burgeoning phenomenon of independent philosophy. I do not mean to suggest that Schain is representative or typical of this phenomenon. Independent philosophy is not a school of thought or a ‘movement’ voicing a unified philosophy. If there is one trait common to the individuals active in this area, it is that for them philosophy is an anxious, earnest search for the meaning of life.

## A DREAM

(a philosophical tale)

I saw in a dream, reclining under the shade of an ancient plane-tree by a warbling brook — who else but Zeno of Elea, reading to a comely youth out of a tattered scroll.

“If an archer shoots an arrow, the arrow can never reach its target. At any given moment of time, the arrow is in a space equal to its own length. It is therefore at that moment at rest. Hence it is at rest at all moments. An infinite number of positions of rest does not amount to motion. The arrow is at no time in motion and can never reach its target.”

The boy was agape, but before he could speak, there suddenly appeared on the spot a white-haired man and a young woman. They were — I knew it by that mystic cognizance with which we are endowed in dreams — a professor and student of physics from a modern university. They stood close by Zeno and the Greek boy but were apparently unaware of their existence. Yet I could see that Zeno and the boy were attentively watching the new couple. The white-haired professor was intently explaining something to the young student.

“Heisenberg showed that a problem arises when you try to measure the position and the momentum of a particle simultaneously. In his 1927 paper he said — and I think I can trust my memory with the exact words —, ‘The more precisely the position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known in this instant, and vice versa.’ Which means that an inescapable uncertainty is encountered in attempting to observe a single event with two frames of reference. The two frames substantively complement each other,

but at the same time they mutually exclude each other. The juxtaposition of the contradictory frames of reference is necessary to yield an exhaustive view, yet their mutual exclusiveness effectively bars the juxtaposition.”

Then Zeno laughed. “What fools! I have been speaking to them in parables for two and a half millennia and they will not understand.”

I felt the young girl shiver – I felt it in my own bones – as if a foreign presence had just entered into her being. I saw her eyes shine with a strange brilliance. When she spoke her voice sounded as if it came from remote depths in space-time.

“Professor,” she said, “I will not even pretend that I have understood your explanation of the Principle of Indeterminacy, but I have just had a notion, a philosophical notion.” She stood silent for a while. When she spoke again, I somehow felt as if it was not she that was speaking. “From a philosophical point of view, I would suggest that the principle puts us face to face with the fact that all science operates with fictions; creative, productive fictions, but fictions nevertheless. First, permit me to put forward two preliminary propositions. (1) Theoretical science is not – as the widespread misunderstanding, even among practising scientists has it – concerned with finding facts, but with the interpretation of facts. (2) Real things are whole, active, creative processes. The notions of time, space, inert matter, and so on, are abstractions from the whole.”

“Let me now”, she continued, sounding more and more entranced, “get back to the Principle of Indeterminacy. Physicists are nonplussed by the fact that they cannot determine the position and the momentum of a particle simultaneously. The reason, to my mind, is simple. Only the whole process is real. Both the notion of momentum and the notion of position in space are fictions. When you speak of momentum (itself the product of two fictions, mass and velocity) you negate the notion of position in space, and when you speak of position in space you negate the notion of momentum. You can only determine the one by ignoring the other, which in fact has no actual existence. So it is impossible to determine both at the same time, because when you do that you are negating both. More generally, you can represent any whole in terms of an elected abstraction or set of abstractions, but you

cannot exhaust the whole in terms of any set of abstractions.”

The girl fell silent and a look of amazement spread over her features. Surely she was wondering what moved her to say what she had just said. The professor was obviously displeased; no, more than displeased, he was pained. He had had hopes for his student. One word escaped his lips. “Nonsense!”

Then out of nowhere I saw the venerable Alfred North Whitehead advancing. He approached, stood for a while silent, then in a sad voice said, “I too had tried to tell them that, in my philosophy of organism, but no one took notice.”

Then the whole group vanished, and I heard my alarm-clock ringing.

## THE MYSTERY AND THE RIDDLE

### REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Note: I offer these disjointed and chaotic reflections on the problem of evil in the hope that they may yet be found of value as raw material for thought.

1.

I call Good a mystery because, in my view, it is an ultimate reality. Like being and like intelligence, it is simply there and is not amenable to any explanation. Life is not only self-affirming in a narrow sense; it is, essentially and originally, affirmative of life in its generality and universality — and of more than life, of form and of being. Animal love, animal tenderness, animal sympathy, are observable phenomena that extend far beyond a particular animal's offspring. These phenomena are not explainable by reduction to any extraneous factors or circumstances. But if reality is ultimately good, then the existence of evil — however we define evil — is a riddle that calls for explanation.

2.

In dealing with the problem of evil we have to distinguish clearly between two different problems: (1) The problem of the metaphysical status of evil, and (2) The problem of evil in human behaviour.

3.

The problem of the metaphysical status of evil must have occupied the minds of thoughtful human beings from the earliest times. Human beings found themselves surrounded by forces that seemed inimical: hurricanes, fires, ferocious beasts, pain, and death. Who brought about all that destruction and suffering? The angry gods? And if there is just one most powerful god or goddess, is he or she vicious? But in other ways he/she seems to be very benevolent. Is he/she contesting against another equally or nearly equally powerful god or goddess?

4.

There were certain creeds that regarded evil as ultimate. But to regard evil as ultimate entails either an ultimate dualism (Ahura Mazda has to fight against Ahriman), which I find metaphysically untenable, or an anthropomorphic conception of the ultimate being as a limited animal with all the constraints, contradictions, conflicts, and imperfections that we find in ourselves (Jahweh, for no conceivable reason makes Satan, and then gives him free rein), which is metaphysically puerile.

5.

So, the metaphysical problem of evil only arises within the framework of a world-view that makes an omnipotent power or powers responsible for the world. If God is personal, omnipotent, and omniscient then, to my mind, no argument can exonerate him/her of responsibility for all the calamities and the suffering that we find all around us. All theodicies are unavailing. But if we elect to give up belief in a personal, omnipotent, and omniscient God rather than allow Evil to dwell in the highest places, then we have no need for a theodicy and we can go on to address the problem of evil in human life, in the individual and in society.

6.

If Reality is, as I maintain, essentially creative then only the transcendent creative act is eternal. All determinate existents in which the creative act is

actualized are necessarily transient. All that is actual is in process of becoming. All life is ephemeral. We are constantly dying: not only our body but our feelings, our thoughts, our emotions, our memories, our moments of glory, are constantly passing away, and the death that comes at the end of our term of life is only a more glaring instance of the selfsame process. All of this is tragic but not evil.

7.

Life is intrinsically tragic, as all existence is tragic because essentially transient. And human life will always be subject to the injuries inseparable from its natural frailty. But neither death nor illness nor natural catastrophe can canker life as corrupt thought can. It is the diseased thought of human beings that mars life and is the origin of all evil: selfishness and bigotry and the valuation of what is of no true value and the worship of false gods. But for these evils, life could be wholly good.

8.

The biological phenomenon of pain is a vital function and is not in itself evil. Even excruciating physical pain, which makes life intolerable, is not an evil in nature. It is in the same class as natural disasters. Of course pain wilfully inflicted by a human being on another living creature, is the most vicious form of evil; but pain resulting from some natural ailment or accident I would not call evil.

9.

I do not concern myself here with the pathological, with psychopathic conditions, which we may be tempted to describe as pure evil. These are explicable, but their explanation is a matter for specialized psychological studies. I do not see them as raising a fundamental philosophical problem.

10.

In the dialogues of Plato we find Socrates again and again affirming that no



one does moral wrong willingly. This is a cardinal article of Socratic faith which I seek to vindicate. As A. E. Taylor puts it, “A man has temporarily to sophisticate himself into regarding evil as good before he will choose to do it” (*Socrates*, 1933, ch. IV). The tragedy of human life is that we sophisticate ourselves into regarding evil as good, not temporarily but permanently, through institutions, dogmas, superstitions, and spurious and meretricious values.

11.

Human beings are human in virtue of their living in a world of their own creation. To take this in the sense that civilized human beings live in an *ambience* constituted by inventions, contrivances, systems and organizations produced by the ingenuity of human beings, would be trite though true. What I mean goes much beyond that. I maintain that humankind as a species, and individual human beings, are only specifically human inasmuch as they live in a world constituted by ideas (a blanket term) which are the creation of the human mind, from the most basic concepts which are a necessary dimension of simple perception and without which impressions and sensations remain devoid of subjectivity, to the most sophisticated scientific or philosophical world-view, to the highest ideals of magnanimity, generosity, integrity, and the like. As a corollary to this, I further maintain that all human behaviour is shaped by the cultural make-up of groups and individual persons. I maintain that drives, instincts, propensities, incentives and what not, that are thought to determine behaviour, are all, on the human plane, neutral, providing the material of action, that can only be actualized in determinate form under the influence of ideas. The same elemental drive under the formative governance of different ideal systems results in radically different modes of behaviour. The same ideal system conjoined to different elemental drives produces forms of behaviour that are modally distinct but essentially congenital. In short, I maintain that all behaviour, on the human plane, is shaped by ideas and ideals, beliefs and superstitions, values and illusions, dreams and fears, that all have their rise and origin in the human mind. The noblest of human deeds and the most atrocious of human actions are equally the offspring of mind-generated ideas: the self-denying

benevolence of a Mother Teresa or a Schweitzer equally with the bloodthirsty actions of a tyrant or the deeds of a common serial killer are in a most strict sense realizations of ideas and could never occur apart from the influence of ideas.

12.

Apart from physical catastrophes and natural ailments, all human misery stems from religions — not only the traditional systems known by that appellation, though these have their ponderous share, but also the religions of material values, of false ideals, of the delusions of pleasure, of power or of glory. All of these – equally with the religions of heaven and hell, of divine wrath and divine inculcations, of original sin and original evil – are creeds, systems of belief, set above life and the spontaneity of the pure, unencumbered will which issues in life-affirmation and joyful creativity. The cause of all the misery in the world is to be found in superstition, narrow-mindedness and bigotry — the cause of all misery engendered by human beings resides in the minds, the thoughts, of humans. (Of course a great portion of natural ailments and natural calamities are also human-induced, partly through ignorance and venial ineptitude, but largely through false beliefs, mistaken values, illusory goals.)

13.

Ideas constitute the world of a human being. A brute, or a person nurtured in the wild, in complete isolation from human society, would, I believe, have various drives and impulses, some affirmative and constructive and some negative and destructive. It is only when those drives and impulses are placed under and directed by ideas that they become good in a higher sense, as only spiritual values can be good; or evil as only human behaviour can be evil. Nevertheless, we may be less in error if we call affirmative deeds bereft of thought good, since nature is elementally good, than if we call thoughtless negative deeds evil rather than neutral.

14.

All evil-doing is moral blindness. Macbeth is blinded by the goal he has set himself; his understanding is completely and exclusively riveted to that one goal; he is totally incapable of bringing any other consideration to the light of understanding.

15.

In the way of making for evil, the role of religious ideas cannot be over-emphasized, but the role of the secular store of ideas is equally ponderous: ideas of honour and mastery and propriety and inherited fictions we thoughtlessly hold as to what is desirable and what is beneficial. What a joke it is to call the human being a thinking animal when the whole of humanity throughout its history has been nothing but a solid mass of thoughtlessness. Alas for Socrates! were he to come into our present-day world, he would die of dejection and despair.

16.

Only behaviour that issues from ideas is behaviour on the human plane. It is then either free action, when the ideas are consciously examined and rationally appropriated or it is determined passion when the ideas are externally imposed and passively acquiesced in. Behaviour that issues from warped ideas is also 'human' in the sense that only human beings are capable of such vicious doings; but it is not free: it is not action (in Spinoza's sense) but passion. Even when the ideas are good and the behaviour commendable, if the ideas are not rationally embraced, then it cannot be rated any higher than what Plato termed 'demotic virtue'. Socrates' examinings sought to convert the conventionally received ideals of virtue into reasoned principles. That is what moral philosophy can do and should do, to lead us to the fount of all goodness in us, not by analyses and syllogisms, but by revealing the essential intelligibility of virtue as the creative affirmation of intelligence.

17.

All human dealings are intertwined with human-made institutions, human-made laws, and human-made creeds and superstitions — human-made meaning the product of thought, of imagination and of reason, that is, of ideas.

18.

Both Abraham and Agamemnon were willing to offer human sacrifice in obedience to a thought system. Agamemnon was morally superior to Abraham in that he sacrificed his daughter to the good of the community, whereas Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son to no good, but in obedience to the unjustified dictate of a capricious tyrant. But the significant point for our present purpose is that both were acting in pursuance of accepted ideas.

19.

A human being becomes a person when, by virtue of the idea of the 'I' s/he gains subjectivity, positing the self in opposition to the not-self. But the I, the self, like all fictions, has no essential fixity. Over and above its contextual fluidity, (the I that enjoys a nice ice-cream is not the same I that is joyed when my favourite soccer team scores a goal), various experiential and cultural influences are effective in forming the boundaries of the self, and make all the difference between the narrowly constricted self of a James Steerfort or an Uriah Heep and the virtually boundless self of a Daniel Peggotty or a Thomas Traddles in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*.

20.

Perhaps the major fault of traditional psychology was the tendency to fragment the human being. Our starting point, the ground on which we should take our stand and from which we should proceed, should be the whole human being — the only reality we know directly, immediately and unquestionably.

21.

It would be more conducive to an understanding of human nature to regard a human being not as consisting of so many powers, faculties, etc. (as students of the human psyche from Plato and Aristotle down to modern psychologists have tended to do), but as made up of so many different strata or planes of being. Theories of the subconscious and the unconscious have perhaps moved in that direction, but I think there is still need for a more clear-headed approach.

22.

A human being is partly matter; and matter has its own habits, its own character. (My inner mentor tells me not to shun metaphor, for all language is metaphorical and all truth is metaphorical.) A human being is flesh and blood; and flesh has its proper habits and its proper character. A human being is a bundle of drives and emotions and passions; and these psychic factors have their wonted ways and a character of their own. A human being is a reservoir of memories, beliefs, dreams and ideals; and these all, individually and collectively, have their behavioural traits and their character.

23.

Thus an individual human being exists on various planes of being. On each of those planes s/he belongs to a special world and is subject to the laws and influences of that world. On the physical plane a stream of gamma radiation changes her/his constitution. On the molecular plane an aspirin tablet, a glass of whisky, a puff of contaminated air can change her/his temper for better or for worse. On the biological plane a bacterium or a virus can disrupt her/his vital processes. (In giving these instances I speak as a layman, claiming no knowledge and making no attempt at scientific correctness.) Up to this point we meet with nothing peculiar to humans; in all of this a human being differs in no way from any other animal. But a human being lives also on an ideal plane, a plane constituted by ideas, beliefs, values, purposes. When I speak of an ideal plane I do not refer specifically or exclusively to sublime or elevated ideals. Complete morons apart, every human individual – from a

Mother Teresa to the most depraved of serial killers – lives in her or his own world of ideas, beliefs and values. How these ideas (to use this word as a blanket term) are formed or acquired is, in my opinion, the central problem of education, of moral philosophy, of political theory.

24.

For once let us, in philosophizing, follow the example of science. Let our question be, not: How should we act?, but: How do we act? We shall find that we do good spontaneously because there is goodness in us: because we have being and all being is perfection and in its creativity affirms perfection. The difference between the action of one agent and that of another stems from the measure of wholeness realized in the ideal constitution of the one agent or the other.

25.

Goodness, sympathy and tenderness, disinterestedness and generosity, friendliness, love of beauty, love of peace and serenity, love of life, the will to affirm, the joy of creativity — all of that is not only possible and natural but is also amply exemplified in all walks of life, in the animal world, among primitive peoples, and in imaginative literature (which I consider of no less significance than factual records). And normal human beings, I believe, are never without a hankering to all of that and a secret belief that that is the way to true happiness. What, then, are the causes that lead human beings to be (in Aristotle's phrase) 'maimed as regards their potentiality for virtue'?

26.

There are two distinct and opposed religions that go about clothed in the loose cloak of Christianity: one whose principle is love and another whose principle is hostility to sin. The first is life-affirming and joyful and is commonly the source of much good. The second is life-denying and sorrowful and is commonly the source of much evil.

27.

Sensuality, lust, submission to the allurements of pleasure, all that traditional Christian morality castigates as sins of the flesh; all of that cannot justly be condemned on moral grounds. It is on psychological, hygienic and practical grounds that inordinate pleasure-seeking can be taken to task. The distinction here is not indifferent. It is important that our thinking should be clear on the subject, because confused thinking here necessarily leads to a diseased philosophy of life. Acceptance of the denunciation of pleasure on moral grounds results in a life-negating attitude while the unthinking reaction against that attitude results in a more or less dissolute style of life that leaves little or no room for spiritual values.

28.

We need a life-affirming Stoicism: a philosophy of life that holds that our dearest treasure is within us but knows that our inward worth can and must be realized in creative activity, in deeds of love, in 'a thing of beauty', even in simple pleasures. And when we are unfortunate, we can fall back on our inalienable and invincible stronghold within ourselves and forfeit all outer good things without denying their value.

29.

In a nutshell, my position is that, contrary to traditional Christian teaching, the flesh is pure. The flesh never sins. Our instincts, our natural drives, may be blind and may err through ignorance, but moral wrongdoing is always brought about by and through an idea. Does that square with the Socratic position that nobody does wrong willingly? Fully, because the idea that leads to wrongdoing is always an ignorant idea, a fiction taken too seriously, an illusion parading as reality. 'Lead us not into temptation' translates into 'give us understanding', and 'deliver us from evil' into 'free us from self-deception'.

30.

Beasts live and die; they may occasionally suffer, but their life on the whole

seems worthwhile. But humans fill their life with false expectations, unattainable desires, claims on others and counter-claims that can only breed tragic conflict and gnawing grief. A human's thought is her/his glory; yet it is just that thought that can turn a human being's life into a sham and a shambles.

31.

Nietzsche was right. Every honest human being will readily admit that there is cruelty in her/him/self and much vice (however this may be defined). But against this I think it is necessary to acknowledge and to emphasize two truths. Firstly, that it is not what we naturally are that matters morally but what we determine to make ourselves into. The ideals we adopt and the values we elect and seek to uphold are what we truly are as human beings. Secondly, there is in us also much natural goodness, the spontaneous affirmation of the love of being and love of life which are our birthright as intelligent beings.

32.

Aristotle speaks of things 'pleasant to people of vicious constitution'. We might think of the 'pleasure' people experience in watching cruel sports or in themselves committing acts of cruelty and atrocity. Here we are clearly not dealing with pleasure but with the discharge, the outburst, the decompression, of vicious complexes and pressures – reducible to negative beliefs and judgements – formed under the impact of adverse experiences. This applies to all destructive impulses and attitudes.

33.

Violence is possibly a composite phenomenon, and instances of violent behaviour may differ widely in the extent to which the one element or the other enters into their constitution. There is a culture of violence and much violence in the contemporary world is fuelled by articulate systems of ideas and scales of value. But much violence also is mainly a physical eruption. When it is such and to the extent that it is such, it calls for medication rather



than edification, as Aristotle rightly thought.

34.

The case of an evil person who desires to harm a good person for no other reason than the other person's goodness is in my view a case of envy. The evil person knows that s/he has a defect; s/he envies the good person for her/his goodness; s/he wants to deface and to remove the good person's goodness as the source of the evil person's painful awareness of her/his own defect. This schematic sketch may sound very silly, but I believe it is basically true.

35.

When a person feels that her/his life is vacant, s/he will choose to fill it with anything rather than face the horror of a blank life, which is the negation of life. This horror of the blank, in fortunate individuals, is the source of creative work, of art and discovery and of heroic deeds and of self-sacrificing benevolence. But in less fortunate persons it can lead to self-torment or torment inflicted on others. I do not think such a person deliberately chooses one of these alternatives in preference to the other; the choice is foisted on her/him by circumstances. I think this explains much of what appears as senseless cruelty and evil.

36.

In every one of us there is a Dr Jekyll and a Mr Hyde. Both the Jekyll and the Hyde are natural and also non-natural: natural in the sense that both are built on raw material that is inborn in us; non-natural because the inborn raw material can never determine specific character; both the Jekyll and the Hyde are the product of ideas and values giving specific shape to the material. How do the Jekyll and the Hyde live side by side in the same person? They do so because all of us are only more or less integrated and streamlined. All of us are the product of multifarious influences, the conflux of various tributaries. Only the most fortunate of us, the wisest and the best,

attain a fair measure of harmony and of unity.

37.

I think it is wrong to assume that we naturally seek to maximize our own pleasure. I think the more basic drive is to realize our perfection. The quest of pleasure is only a particular, conditioned (acquired), specification of the quest of perfection. Likewise, I think people seek power because it is a form of the extension of the self.

38.

I am free when I act spontaneously in fulfilment of my 'self'. But, more often than not, my 'action' is not spontaneous. Leaving aside for the moment the question of external pressures and drives, my spontaneity can be marred by internal conflict. This is possible because 'I' am not a wholly-formed, stable entity. I am continually being formed and re-formed.

39.

In *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1111a-b, Aristotle criticizes Plato's usage of the terms voluntary and involuntary. To my mind this shows the difference between two mentalities. One might say that while Plato is thinking ethically, Aristotle is thinking legalistically. When Plato says that an act done in anger or in obedience to appetite is not voluntary, he, true to his Socratic inspiration (however much he may have modified the theoretical architecture of Socrates' ethics), means to reserve the appellation voluntary for acts done in exercise of what is best in a human being. In all base and wicked acts a person is not true to her/him/self, and even in neutral deeds a person is not acting on the highest plane of her/his being.

40.

Aristotle says that "outbursts of anger and sexual appetites ... actually alter our bodily condition, and in some men even produce fits of madness" (*Ethica Nicomachea*, 1147a, tr. W. D. Ross). I think this points to the most

distressing and puzzling question relating to the problem of freewill: What determines human behaviour, thought or chemistry? The question here cannot in truth be posed in the form whether x or y. The significant question is, How are the planes of chemistry and thought related? This is an empirical question to be studied by the methods of science. Whatever the results we arrive at, it remains true that only when our behaviour is governed by our ideas are we living on the human plane. But how sad it is to realize what rarity this is in the life of every individual of us and in the life of humankind at large.

41.

“The explanation of how the ignorance is dissolved and the incontinent man regains his knowledge, is the same as in the case of the man drunk or asleep and is not particular to this condition; we must go to the students of natural science for it” (Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1147b, tr. W. D. Ross).

Aristotle is right here. Ethical theory need not concern itself with abnormalities and aberrations, except marginally: “we must go to the students of science” for that. The rapist and the serial killer are for the therapist and the legislator to deal with, not the moral philosopher.

42.

The long and the short of the matter is that when people do wrong, they are not human; they are another kind of being. Aristotle was right: to explain or to cure wrongdoing we have to go to the scientist not to the philosopher. The final word of philosophy is that when a human being is in full possession of her/his humanity, s/he only acts in love and understanding. The Socratic ethics is only seen as wrong-headed when we take it as applying to the sub-humans that the best of us are most of the time and most of us are all the time. When we are and for the duration of the time that we are the human beings we are meant to be, we can do nothing but what we think good and just and noble. That we often do otherwise is regrettable and explainable. The study and the treatment of our behaviour under those circumstances is the task of psychology, psychotherapy, paedagogy, jurisdiction, criminology, and the like. The task of philosophy is to keep before our eyes

the excellence we should aspire to and can and do realize — haltingly, intermittently, but, hopefully, in time, more and more consistently. The alternative is to acquiesce in the doom and final ruin of humanity.

43.

Socrates had true insight, the insight that is the essence of wisdom and that is the whole of wisdom. He may have fumbled all his life for the best manner of putting his insight into words. But there was a kernel of truth — most profound and most precious — in his belief that to know what is good is to be good. Perhaps it was unfortunate that he went on to ask: What is that knowledge or what knowledge is that? For knowledge of the good can only be defined in terms of the good. The more opportune question would be: How do we come by that knowledge? And in seeking the answer to this question we find the answer to the first question. The knowledge of the good is not theoretical knowledge. We cannot arrive at it by any deduction or any reasoning. It is an experience. We know the good when the good in us is allowed to flourish.

44.

But how best — coming down to the details and particulars of practice — can we allow the good in us to flourish? That is the problem of education, that is the whole essence of the art and science of education. If virtue is ‘knowledge’, how can it be taught? The difficulty is engendered by the unfortunate use of the word ‘knowledge’. But if virtue is soundness of mind, then it is easy to see that it is not to be taught but developed. This is the positive element in the doctrine of anamnesis: we do not inculcate virtue; we help the soul come to flower.

45.

It is no metaphor to say that the babe at its mother’s breast sucks in love. It is there and then that it receives the first seed of morality, which is then nourished by every harmonious sound, every beautiful form, every kindly

touch.

46.

How can we relate the influences that mould a child's character in the earliest stages of life to the view that human behaviour is wholly governed by ideas? When a child, in its earliest days, is taught that one thing is desirable and another undesirable, this may either involve the inculcation of a belief or the imposition of a conditioned reflex (or, as is more likely, a mixture of this and that). As long as the desire or the aversion remains merely a 'conditioned reflex', then the agent, in behaving in obedience to those desires or aversions, is behaving on a sub-human level, is not acting on the plane of intelligent personality. All of us live and behave on such a sub-human level most of the time, and for most of the time this is innocuous. But when we find our behaviour clashing with a value we consciously hold, then it is always possible for a well-formed person to examine, to question and to correct her/his habitual attitudes and behaviour. So that it is still possible to maintain that the behaviour of a human being – living and acting as a human being – is always subject to her/his ideas and ideals, good or bad.

47.

Mark Twain speaks somewhere of the collision of a sound heart and a deformed conscience: All human evil – all evil, because I know of no evil outside the sphere of human action and human dealings – is attributable to deformed conscience. If we all grew up without any interference foreign to our elemental nature, independently and autonomously like wild flowers, we would all have sound hearts and there would be no room for conscience – sound or deformed – and there would be no collision and no conflict. A deformed conscience is constituted by acquired false judgements and acquired false values; by inherited dogmas and inherited prejudices. Even what we call a conflict of interests cannot arise, on the human plane, without a pre-determined set of ideas and values. Without any conscience whatever we would not have evil, but without an enlightened conscience we would not have the highest, noblest morality.

48.

I don't think that rivalry among 'wild' animals is an evil trait in those animals. They do not act viciously. They do not seek to harm others, but only to realize their own good. The same is also true of little children. Some little children are violent or fierce; many commit acts that, by mature standards, are cruel. But all such deeds and acts have a positive content and if rightly directed will turn to good. When a little child behaves aggressively one moment and the next moment behaves sympathetically, the two types of behaviour do not proceed from contradictory motives but from contrary viewpoints, contrary perspectives. In educating a child we do not have to extirpate its aggressiveness but to broaden its sympathy. In our day-to-day doings we often catch ourselves acting in forgetfulness of the good of others. How often and how effectively one does or does not remedy this forgetfulness may be all that differentiates a benevolent person from a selfish one.

49.

It is said that certain of the brutes – the camel, the elephant – take vengeance on persons that hurt them. It may be that this is not in the same class as vengeance in human beings. It may be that a camel encountering a person that had inflicted harm on it, reflexively acts to pre-empt expected harm. (I purposely express myself here crudely and vaguely as I do not wish to suggest an excursion into animal psychology.) I think this is something quite different from a human being harbouring the intention of revenge, which essentially involves a system of beliefs and values. Of course a human being, being an animal, may also behave in a similar situation purely as an animal. In that case I would not describe the behaviour as morally evil.

50.

I cannot say that I am good and someone else is evil. I know that I am quite as liable as that someone else to be blinded to the good and to be overwhelmed by the contingencies that make for folly and error. The difference lies not in the nature of this or that person; it is simply that some persons are fortunate in having had an upbringing and circumstances that

enabled them to be in communion with the good in them while others are unfortunate in that their upbringing or circumstances shut them off, more or less, from the spring of good in them. The only right attitude towards 'evil' persons is expressed in the words of Jesus: They know not what they do.

51.

Does the explainability of evil preclude the condemnation of evil? It all depends on what we mean by condemnation. I say that the evil-doer is not free, is not truly human. That's moral condemnation, isn't it? If by condemnation we mean subjection to penal and corrective measures, that's a practical matter that has to be decided in each case in the light of practical considerations: the good of the wrong-doer and/or the good of other members of the community. It is never morally right to take vengeance.

52.

If I view the wrongdoer as a plaything of forces beyond her/his ken, does that necessarily mean that we have to regard ourselves in the same way? My answer is No, because the point of morality is precisely this, that to attain our perfection as human beings we have to be the authors of our action.

53.

It seems to me that when Plato, in the *Symposium*, after giving Diotima's account of the ascent to what we may justifiably designate as the beatific vision brings in Alcibiades's account of his own experience under the influence of Socrates, he wants to point out that even such an essentially generous and noble nature as Alcibiades's can hardly be brought round to virtue if it has not been in-formed in the first place by the right influences. Virtue indeed is wisdom, but that wisdom is not any kind of theoretical knowledge; it is 'knowledge' of the beautiful and the good as experienced.

54.

A genetic propensity to aggressiveness is not necessarily translated into

wrongful behaviour. There are types of characters, modes of behaviour, but determinate behaviour is the outcome of the character or general mode shaped into specific acts by the individual's system of ideas [ideals, values, aims]. I believe that nobody is born a criminal. There is no genetic or inherent criminality; there can only be genetic or inherent irascibility, impetuosity, forcefulness, cunning, roguery, but these are all morally neutral; under the impress of the individual's ideas they can find their realization in heroism, in exploits of discovery and adventure, in flights of fancy, or, on the other side, in criminal deeds and activities.

55.

I do not think that 'desiring to do some harm to the person who is the object of your anger' is 'primitively intelligible' (Peter Goldie, "Explaining Expressions of Emotion", *Mind*, Jan. 2000, p.28) or rational. You can be pained and angry and yet entertain no desire to do any harm. You may take out your anger on yourself or on an inanimate object, without any desire to harm the person who engendered your anger. And we cannot regard the desire to harm the object of our anger as rational if our action serves no purpose. (Peter Goldie may mean by 'primitively intelligible' no more than that we can imagine ourselves doing the same thing in a similar situation. Properly defined, that would be a legitimate use of the expression. Still, I would think it an unhappy choice since it tends to suggest that the desire is rational, which I do not think is the case.)

56.

Desiring to do harm to the object of our anger is not in the same class as 'desiring' to get away from the object of our fear. A wild animal fighting to the death with another, is not venting its anger. It is defending itself, its young, or its livelihood. Its anger is sheer adrenalin. When the adversary retreats, defeated, the victor entertains no further desire to harm it or to wreak vengeance on it. All our evil desires are belief-induced.



57.

If the inescapable egotism (more accurately: egocentrism) of the human being is taken to be antithetical to morality, then how can we explain our willing submission to the dictates of morality? The egotism of a human being is simply the necessary grounding of all individual activity in a center of self-awareness: to be a self is to be self-centred. This does not preclude the self being expansive and life-affirming. Sympathy is as natural, as instinctive as self-assertion. I venture to say that there is no empirical evidence to show that Hobbes' 'war of every man against every man' has ever been the 'state of nature', not even if we put the word 'animal' or 'beast' in place of the word 'man'. It is not companionship and friendliness and cooperation, whether among humans or among other animals, that call for explanation but antagonism and animosity and conflict. It is these that are due to special causes. I think Kant was not consistent in his endorsement of Hobbes' view of human nature. When Kant says, "As Hobbes maintains, the state of nature is a state of injustice and violence, and we have no option save to abandon it and submit ourselves to the constraint of law", he negates the autonomy of morality. We have to submit ourselves to the constraint of the moral law, but that submission is not a choice of expediency but a choice that responds to a deep-seated aspiration to inner perfection. Even if we had no evidence to the contrary and believed that human association and human solidarity developed only under self-seeking motives, we can still say that the sentiments of fellow-feeling and sympathy and love that were then engendered translated humankind into a realm of autonomous morality transcending all self-seeking motivation.

58.

Benevolence is not opposed to self-love. Far from it. Self-love is the necessary ground for all virtue. Self-love is nothing but the primitive and simple outcome of the joy of living. In a healthy environment it develops into positive and creative life-affirmation, which is the essence of all morality. A vicious person is not motivated by self-love or self-interest. More often than not, a person who wrongs others hates her/him/self more than s/he hates the one s/he wrongs. In all cases, wrongdoing stems from

narrow-mindedness, from a constricted personality, from ignorance, not the philosophic ignorance that Socrates advocated, but the moral ignorance he spent his whole life combating.

59.

It is not through knowledge of nature and mastery over nature that humanity can achieve its elusive goal. Technological wizardry, political, economic and organizational acumen may all be necessary conditions of living, especially with our ever-increasing numbers. But it is only understanding, the understanding of ourselves, of the meaning and purpose of life, of what gives life meaning and value, that can make human life worthwhile.

60

People are beginning to dream of changing human nature by altering our genes. Whether that is possible or not, whether that is desirable or not, I think it is both desirable and feasible to change human behaviour by altering our ideas and beliefs. Of course, before doing that, we have to agree on which ideas and beliefs are to be changed and which are to be adopted. And that is just another reason why, perhaps now more than at any other time, we need philosophy and free philosophical discussion, because only philosophy is competent to examine the wholesomeness and worth of ideas, ideals and values.

61.

Good literature and good art are the best, the most powerful, disseminators of true values. Unfortunately, in our contemporary world, much that goes by the name of literature and art is pernicious because it does not spring from love, does not spring from genuine spontaneous creativity, but from those very false attachments and delusions that it is the task of true literature and true art to remove.

62.

Understanding can change Earth into Heaven — this was my childhood faith and it remains the cardinal article of my religion at the close of my life. But are all people capable of attaining this understanding, this Socratic ‘knowledge’? I believe, Yes. As strongly, as unwaveringly, as naively as Socrates, I believe in the perfectibility of humankind. All undeformed minds are capable of flowering into the understanding that makes men good and happy. By a proper education that begins at the mother’s breast, fortified by good example and sympathetic handling, nurtured with all forms of beauty, nourished by imaginative representations of fine ideas and ideals — in a healthy atmosphere where these ideas and ideals prevail: aye, there’s the rub! for to clear the corrupting influences that infest all human society today is the Herculean task that the combined efforts of women and men of goodwill may not be equal to, so that the utter and final destruction of civilization — perhaps of the very existence of humankind — seems a much more likely outcome than the salvation of humanity .. (I know that I have left my sentence gaping at a chasm; let it be, for such is the state of humanity’s fate!)

63.

Life can be beautiful, to humanity at large and to individual human beings. It may be overwhelmed by tragedy and beset with calamities; the heart may be wrung with grief; and yet life can remain pure and beautiful and worthwhile. Why is it then that for most people it is never, and for all people not always, that? It is because of human stupidity and folly and want of understanding.

64.

If I thought for a moment that my optimistic portrayal of human nature would dampen our revulsion and horror at the atrocities perpetrated all around us in the world, I would not have permitted myself to give voice to these views. My hope is that, if we are convinced of the goodness of human nature, that would shore up the fortitude necessary to keep up the fight.

65.

The situation of humanity at the turn of the twenty-first century can be summed up as follows: Humanity is now very rich in knowledge, with unlimited prospects of progress in that direction at an unprecedented tempo; at the same time, it is miserably poor in wisdom; not only is it not advancing in that direction, but it seems to be forfeiting much of the tentative gain it had made in past ages, and the path of progress is foggy and uncharted and those who claim to have some idea as to how to tread it are all at loggerheads with one another and often actively at one another's throats. It is a situation that is no less catastrophic than it is tragic.

66.

And the remedy? I have no better claim than anyone else to the possession of the answer, but in such a situation every person must stand up and be counted. This is no time for fake modesty. The remedy, as I see it, is nothing but the old Socratic proceeding: to take hold of a hefty broom to sweep off the junk that clutters our minds and take a good candid look at our inner reality — at our soul in its nakedness.

## NOTES AND FRAGMENTS

## BERTRAND RUSSELL AND LEIBNIZ

[The following note contains the seed of an article on Bertrand Russell's reading of Leibniz. If I will ever write that article or not, I don't know. 14 Jan. 2006.]

Bertrand Russell begins his *Philosophy of Leibniz* (first published in 1900) with a chapter entitled "Leibniz's Premises". This looks like the sensible thing to do, and for certain purposes it may actually be the best thing to do. But behind this approach lurks an erroneous assumption.

No philosopher philosophizes or arrives at any of his philosophical positions by setting out from certain definitely formulated premises. A philosopher, meditating on a problem, struggling with a perplexity, or quietly, serenely contemplating a nebulous intellectual landscape, "in vacant or in pensive mood", to borrow the inspired words of Wordsworth, there "flash upon that inward eye" a vision or an idea that lends intelligibility to the problem, the perplexity, the confused and nebulous manifoldity. Thereafter the philosopher, in reviewing and ordering his thought, discovers in his vision or idea implied principles and grounds. These s/he may set forth for the purposes of exposition as premises from which the original vision 'follows': naturally it has to follow, in virtue of the organic bond between the whole and the members that came into being through the creation of the whole.

But these premises that are so helpful and so useful for exposition, for elucidation, for didactic purposes, are the underbelly of a philosopher's position. They can never prove sound and firm when viewed from outside

the whole, the original vision, that gave them birth. For no definite formulation of thought can escape the essential imperfection of all things finite. To be finite is to be grounded in negation and subject to contradiction. That is why all philosophical doctrines, views, and systems claiming to be true and demonstrable can easily be torn to shreds by critics. Only when seen as an oracular vision whose value resides in its intrinsic intelligibility can the philosophy of a Leibniz, a Schopenhauer, a Whitehead, stand side by side with the others without our having to demolish the one to support the other.

Once Bertrand Russell proceeds from an examination of Leibniz' premises, he can show that the philosophy of Leibniz does on the whole follow consistently from his premises but that in the end the whole must tumble into rubble.

In reviewing Russell's examination of the philosophy of Leibniz my concern is to show how NOT to read the work of a great philosopher. ....

## BERGSON AND RUSSELL

### TWO POSITIONS ON BEING AND NOTHINGNESS

Bertrand Russell and Henri Bergson were veritable antipodes. Russell early shed off his youthful Platonism in favour of a thoroughgoing empiricism. Bergson discarded his early interest in mathematics, turning to psychology, then progressing from biology to high mysticism. The contrast is clearly illustrated in their respective approaches to the notions of being and nothingness.

In “Why I Am Not A Christian”(1) Russell shows the inanity of the First-Cause argument for the existence of God. He says, “If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God ...”. The argument from First Cause does not tell us anything about the nature of the First Cause: call it God or *Nous* or Big Bang, that, in itself, does not tell us anything about the character or nature of that First Cause.

Thus far I go fully along with Russell. But when he goes on to say, “There is no reason why the world could not have come into being without a cause; nor, on the other hand, is there any reason why it should not have always existed”, I think Russell is wrong in implying that these two alternative assumptions stand on an equal footing. I find the suggestion that the world could “have come into being without a cause” simply unintelligible. If we begin with nothing, I find it utterly inconceivable that anything should then have come to be.

To my mind, being – that there should have been anything rather than



nothing – is the ultimate mystery. It is unexplainable and that's that. The idea of God does not explain it. If we begin by assuming the existence of God, then that may explain the existence of our actual world, but it leaves the being of God unexplained; so we are back where we were.

It is true that Russell goes on to say, "There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all." That I accept. But Russell immediately adds, "The idea that things must have a beginning is really due to the poverty of our imagination." I do not feel easy about that. It damps the sense of the mystery of being, and I believe it is this sense, when heightened, that gives birth to philosophic wonder, without which there is no genuine philosophy.

Now to Bergson. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* Bergson writes, "We have shown elsewhere that part of metaphysics moves, consciously or not, around the question of knowing why anything exists — why matter, or spirit, or God, rather than nothing at all? But the question presupposes that reality fills a void, that underneath Being lies nothingness, that *de jure* there should be nothing, that we must therefore explain why there is *de facto* something. And this presupposition is pure illusion, for the idea of absolute nothingness has not one jot more meaning than a square circle." (2) Let us just recall in passing that Plato also says in the *Sophist* (3) that absolute nothingness is unthinkable. But does not Bergson's dismissal of the question deflate the sense of the mystery of being which I hold to be valuable? No. The human intellect inevitably poses the question Why and inevitably raises the chimera of Nothingness, and so we are not wrong when we say that for the human intellect Being will remain an ultimate mystery and that mystery unfolds in the profoundest reflections on the meaning and value of our own being.

(1) "Why I Am Not A Christian", a lecture delivered by Russell to the National Secular Society, South London Branch, at Battersea Town Hall, on March 6, 1927, available online at <http://users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html>

(2) Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, translated by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, with the assistance of W.

Horsfall Carter, 1935, 1954, p.251.

(3) Plato, *Sophist*, 237b-239c.

## NIETZSCHE ON SCHOPENHAUER AND FREE WILL: A NOTE

Nietzsche finds fault with Schopenhauer's conception of the Will. He writes: "Die Philosophen pflegen vom Willen zu reden, wie als ob er die bekannteste Sache von der Welt sei; ja Schopenhauer gab zu verstehen, der Wille allein sei uns eigentlich bekannt, ganz und gar bekannt, ohne Abzug und Zuthat bekannt." (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, I.19.) ["Philosophers are given to speaking of the will as if it were the best-known thing in the world; Schopenhauer, indeed, would have us understand that the will alone is truly known to us, known completely, known without deduction or addition." (tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin Classics.)] Nietzsche fails to understand Schopenhauer's position and the reason for that failure was that – like almost all who dealt and deal with the problem of free will – he confounded free will with choice and conation in general, what we might term volition. All volition, including choice, is conditioned and Nietzsche's analysis in the section from which I have quoted the above lines is perceptive and just, but it misses the point of Schopenhauer's principle. For Schopenhauer the Will is the primordial force that is one with life, one with nature. As such it is, as Schopenhauer holds, known to us immediately. I say that the mind is the one reality known to us immediately. But the mind is creative and active and Schopenhauer chooses to see it in its aspect as will. The action of the will, in my interpretation, while subject to the principle of sufficient reason, is not pre-determined. It is spontaneous and creative. A poet, a mother tending or defending her baby, a lover expressing his love in word or gesture, do not

exercise choice, they have no choice, but they act freely: their action is originaive and could not be predicted by a god or anticipated by a computer that possessed full knowledge of the state of the world the instant before the act. This is the freedom that Spinoza equated with autonomy, except that Spinoza, crippled by his rigid Cartesian rationalism, had no place for creativity or originality. This is the position that I put forward in “Free Will as Creativity” and that I think is needed to put an end to the endless quandaries of the Free Will controversy.

## A QUESTION ABOUT RANDOMNESS

A visitor to my website sent me a message saying: “How would you view an opinion that puts an origin of life in randomness, as opposed to a unity. Wittgenstein’s stumbling place might have been that logic does not understand randomness. etc.” The reply I sent him may be of interest. I reproduce the main body of it here:

Since you seem to have been into my writings, you will probably know that I insist on drawing a clear line between philosophy and science, leaving the investigation of the objective world, as Socrates did, to science, and confining philosophy to the study of the ideas and ideals bred in the mind and by the mind, and which alone give us our proper character as human beings. I may soon be writing a paper on Kant and Plato in which I revert once more to the elucidation of this idea.

Randomness may be a concept, hypothesis, or theory, with a useful role (perhaps rather different roles) in the various sciences and mathematics. As such, in my view, it lies outside the sphere of philosophy proper, and it is not for me to hold or give an opinion about it.

You ask about “an opinion that puts an origin of life in randomness”. Again I would say that the origin of life is a scientific question to be investigated by the objective methods of science and subjected to the objective criteria of science. But while these methods and criteria may give us a description of how life came to be, they cannot tell us what life is. The meaning of life is a philosophical question that is not affected one way or the other by the results of scientific investigation. I maintain that all the hubbub and controversy between creationists, Darwinists, and advocates of Intelligent Design, is wrong-headed on all sides. I have written repeatedly on

this and do not wish to go further into it here.

Also I do not think that the concept of randomness is of any relevance to the question of free will. If you care to look into my views on this question you may read “Free Will as Creativity” which is available on my blog. A shorter version appeared in *Philosophy Pathways* and may be found in [philosophos.com](http://philosophos.com) under Feature Articles.

I am afraid I don’t understand what you mean by your remark that “Wittgenstein’s stumbling place might have been that logic does not understand randomness.” Let me first say that although I have written a long essay about Wittgenstein I must confess that my knowledge of Wittgenstein’s work is very fragmentary. And while your statement that “logic does not understand randomness” is open to various interpretations, I do not feel that in any case it offers a fair critique of Wittgenstein. But, having confessed to my fragmentary acquaintance with Wittgenstein’s work and my failure to understanding the meaning of your statement, any comment I try to make will be mere fumbling in the dark. Still, I will suggest (perhaps rashly) that if you have not yet read my essay on Wittgenstein, you may find it of interest. It is available on my blog.

My correspondent answered with an email packed with thought-provoking questions. I give below the gist of my reply:

Your questions, or rather questionings, especially those packed in the fifth paragraph of your email, suggest to me that you are working towards an integrated philosophical outlook of your own. That, believe me, is a journey that one can only accomplish unaccompanied. A philosopher, like a poet, is a lonely soul. And a philosophical question cannot have one ‘correct’ answer. A question that can have a definitive answer is decidedly not a philosophical question. A philosophical question is an incitement to original, creative thinking. The reason why I value Plato above all other philosophers is that Plato does not give us answers to questions but infects us with his perplexity and makes us think for ourselves.

You ask if Socrates thought of the world as belonging to a whole. It seems that Socrates did not concern himself with metaphysical questions, but in Plato’s development of Socrates’ thought, he (according to my interpretation) not only thought of the world as a whole but considered the

idea of the whole the major key to philosophizing. But I cannot compress my views on this question in a short statement. I may say that each of the four books I have published so far is an attempt to make such a statement.

Where does that leave randomness? If randomness represents the seemingly chaotic world that confronts us and presses in on us on every side, then not only philosophy but the whole of the human endeavour is a ceaseless effort to find order, intelligibility, unity, in that chaos. On that view randomness would not have its place within philosophy but would be the outer darkness that philosophy battles against.

